

Translated Texts for Historians

300–800 AD is the time of late antiquity and the early middle ages: the transformation of the classical world, the beginnings of Europe and of Islam, and the evolution of Byzantium. TTH makes available sources translated from Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Georgian, Gothic and Armenian. Each volume provides an expert scholarly translation, with an introduction setting texts and authors in context, and with notes on content, interpretation and debates.

Editorial Committee

Sebastian Brock, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford
Averil Cameron, Keble College, Oxford
Marios Costambeys, University of Liverpool
Mary Cunningham, University of Nottingham
Carlotta Dionisotti, King's College, London
Peter Heather, King's College, London
Robert Hoyland, University of St Andrews
William E. Klingshirn, The Catholic University of America
Michael Lapidge, Clare College, Cambridge
John Matthews, Yale University
Neil McLynn, Corpus Christi College, Oxford
Richard Price, Heythrop College, University of London
Claudia Rapp, University of California, Los Angeles
Raymond Van Dam, University of Michigan
Michael Whitby, University of Warwick
Ian Wood, University of Leeds

General Editors

Gillian Clark, University of Bristol
Mark Humphries, Swansea University
Mary Whitby, University of Oxford

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

A full list of published titles in the Translated Texts for Historians series is available on request. The most recently published are shown below.

Selected Letters of Libanius from the Age of Constantius and Julian

Translated with introduction and notes by SCOT BRADBURY

Volume 41: 308pp., 2004, ISBN 0-85323-509-0

Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning and On the Soul

Translated and notes by JAMES W. HALPORN; Introduction by MARK VESSEY

Volume 42: 316 pp., 2004, ISBN 0-85323-998-3

Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches

Translated with an introduction and notes by J. H. W. G. LIEBESCHUETZ and CAROLE HILL

Volume 43: 432pp., 2005, ISBN 0-85323-829-4

The Chronicle of Ireland

Translated with an introduction and notes by T. M. CHARLES-EDWARDS

Volume 44: 2 vols., 349pp. + 186pp., 2006, ISBN 0-85323-959-2

The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon

Translated with an introduction and notes by RICHARD PRICE and MICHAEL GADDIS

Volume 45: 3 vols., 365pp. + 312pp. + 312pp., 2005, ISBN 0-85323-039-0

Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah

Translated with an introduction and notes by SCOTT DEGREGORIO

Volume 47: 304pp, 2006, ISBN 978-1-84631-001-0

Bede: On Genesis

Translated with introduction and notes by CALVIN B. KENDALL

Volume 48: 371pp., 2008, ISBN 978-1-84631-088-1

Nemesius: On the Nature of Man

Translated with introduction and notes by R. W. SHARPLES and P. J. VAN DER EIJK

Volume 49: 283pp., 2008, ISBN 978-1-84631-132-1

Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis

Translated with introduction and notes by ADAM H. BECKER

Volume 50: 217pp., 2008, ISBN 978-1-84631-161-1

Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553: with related texts on the Three Chapters Controversy

Translated with an introduction and notes by RICHARD PRICE

Vol. 51, 2 vols, 384pp + 360pp, 2009, ISBN 9781846311789

For full details of Translated Texts for Historians, including prices and ordering information, please write to the following:

All countries, except the USA and Canada: Liverpool University Press, 4 Cambridge Street, Liverpool, L69 7ZU, UK (*Tel* +44-[0]151-794 2233, *Fax* +44-[0]151-794 2235, Email J.M. Smith@liv.ac.uk, <http://www.liverpool-unipress.co.uk>). **USA and Canada:** University of Chicago Press, 1427 E. 60th Street, Chicago, IL, 60637, US (*Tel* 773-702-7700, *Fax* 773-702-9756, www.press.uchicago.edu)

Translated Texts for Historians
Volume 43

Ambrose of Milan

Political Letters and Speeches

Letters, Book Ten, including the oration on the death of
Theodosius I

Letters outside the Collection (*Epistulae extra collectionem*)

Letter 30 to Magnus Maximus

The oration on the death of Valentinian II

Translated with an introduction and notes by
J. H. W. G. LIEBESCHUETZ
with the assistance of CAROLE HILL

Liverpool
University
Press



First published 2005 by
Liverpool University Press
4 Cambridge Street
Liverpool, L69 7ZU

This paperback edition published 2010

Copyright 2005, 2010 J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz

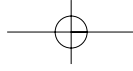
The author's rights have been asserted in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or
by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording,
or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

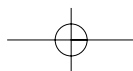
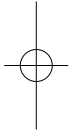
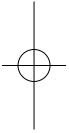
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A British Library CIP Record is available.

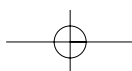
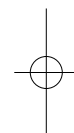
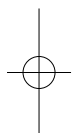
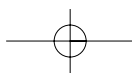
ISBN 978-0-85323-829-4 cased
978-1-84631-243-4 limp

Printed in the European Union by
Bell and Bain Ltd, Glasgow



Once more to Margaret





CONTENTS

Preface	xi
Abbreviations	xii
General Introduction	1
I. The Life of Ambrose of Milan	3
II. The Letters of Ambrose of Milan	27
Translation and commentary	
<i>Letters, Book Ten</i>	
Letters on Matters Arising from the Council of Capua	
Introduction to <i>epistulae</i> 70 and 71	49
<i>Epistula</i> 70 (Maur. 56) to Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria (392)	52
<i>Epistula</i> 71 (Maur. 56a) to the bishops of Macedonia (393)	56
Letters on the Altar of Victory	
Introduction to <i>epistulae</i> 72, 72a and 73	61
<i>Epistula</i> 72 (Maur. 17) to the emperor Valentinian II (384)	62
<i>Epistula</i> 72a (Maur. 17a): Symmachus' <i>Third Relatio</i> to Valentinian II (384)	69
<i>Epistula</i> 73 (Maur. 18) Ambrose's formal reply to Symmachus (384)	78
Letters on the Destruction of the Synagogue at Callinicum	
<i>Epistula</i> 74 (Maur. 40) = <i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 1a to the emperor Theodosius (388/389)	95
Appendix: <i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 1 (Maur. 41), to Ambrose's sister Marcellina (388/389)	111

Ambrose's Conflict with the Empress Justina at Milan

Introduction to <i>Epistulae</i> 75, 75a, 76 and 77	124
<i>Epistula</i> 75 (Maur. 21) to the emperor Valentinian II (AD 386)	136
<i>Epistula</i> 75a (Maur. 21a), also known as <i>Contra Auxentium</i> (386)	142
<i>Epistula</i> 76 (Maur. 20) to Ambrose's sister, Marcellina (386)	160

Oration on the Death of Theodosius I

Introduction	174
<i>De Obitu Theodosii</i> (395)	177

Letter on the Discovery of the Relics of Gervasius and Protasius

<i>Epistula</i> 77 (Maur. 22) to Ambrose's sister, Marcellina (386)	204
---	-----

Letters outside the Collection (*Epistulae extra collectionem*)

Note on <i>Epistulae extra collectionem</i> 1 and 1a	215
---	-----

Letters to Theodosius I on his Victory over the Usurper Eugenius

<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 2 (Maur. 61): Ambrose to the emperor Theodosius I (394)	216
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 3 (Maur. 62): Ambrose to the emperor Theodosius I (394)	218

Letters of the Council of Aquileia (AD 381)

<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 4 (Maur. 10): the bishops of the council to the emperors Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I (381)	221
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 5 (Maur. 11): the bishops of the council to the emperors Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I (381)	227

The Council of Aquileia and the Decisions of the Council of Constantinople

Introduction to <i>Epistulae extra collectionem</i> 6 (Maur. 12), 8 (Maur. 14) and 9 (Maur. 13)	231
---	-----

CONTENTS

ix

Notes on the order of the letters	233
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 6 (Maur. 12): the bishops of the council to the emperors Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I (381)	234
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 9 (Maur. 13): Ambrose and the Italian bishops to the emperor Theodosius I (381)	237
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 8 (Maur. 14): Ambrose and the Italian bishops to the emperor Theodosius I (382)	241

**Petition of a Roman Council to the Emperors
Gratian and Valentinian II**

Introduction	244
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 7: the council to the emperors Gratian and Valentinian II (378)	248

Letter on the Altar of Victory

Introduction	255
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 10 (Maur. 57): Ambrose to the usurper Eugenius (394)	256

Letter on the Massacre at Thessalonica

Introduction	262
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 11 (Maur. 51): Ambrose to the emperor Theodosius I (390)	263

Letters of Ambrose and Gratian

<i>Letter of the emperor Gratian to Ambrose</i> (379)	270
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 12 (Maur. 1): Ambrose to the emperor Gratian (379)	272

Letter on the Date of Easter

Introduction	278
<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 13 (Maur. 23): Ambrose to the bishops of Aemilia (386)	281

Asceticism and Dissension at Vercelli and the Affair of Jovinianus

<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 14 (Maur. 63): Ambrose to the church of Vercelli (396)	292
<i>Letter of Pope Siricius</i> (Maur. 41a)	336

CONTENTS

<i>Epistula extra collectionem</i> 15 (Maur. 42): Ambrose and his fellow bishops to Pope Siricius (393)	339
---	-----

Appendices

Appendix I: Ambrose and Magnus Maximus

Introduction	349
<i>Epistula</i> 30 (Maur. 24): Ambrose to the emperor Valentinian II (date uncertain)	352

Appendix II: Ambrose's Funeral Oration on the Death of Valentinian II (*De Obitu Valentiniani*)

Introduction	358
<i>De Obitu Valentiniani</i> (392)	364

Glossary	400
Bibliography	405
Maps	415
Index	419

PREFACE

The project of translating the political letters of Ambrose was started in summer 2000. Translating is much more difficult than might be thought by those who have not tried their hands at it. Luckily I had much help from some very helpful people. Carole Hill played an important part in the planning and the early years of work on this volume. Special thanks are owed to Peter Walsh who has read all the translations, corrected numerous errors, produced convincing versions of passages that had puzzled the translators, and in very many places improved the English. Robert Markus has read most of the translations, some several times, and the volume has become significantly better for his attentions. I must add that while working on translation and notes I often found myself as it were in conversation with Neil McLynn's *Ambrose of Milan*. The format, the layout, the cover illustration, the bibliography and much more are due to Mark Humphries, an extremely hard-working and understanding editor. Jan Hamilton introduced consistency into an untidy typescript. Mary Whitby guided the project from the beginning with advice, and sometimes diplomacy. The maps were drawn by Stephen Ramsay. Dr Sigrid Mratschek sent me a complimentary copy of her book, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola*, and Klaus and Michaela Zelzer their important article 'Retractationes zu Brief und Briefgenos'. It goes without saying that none of the above-mentioned is responsible for the remaining errors and imperfections.

J. H. W. G Liebeschuetz
Nottingham

ABBREVIATIONS

A. BIBLICAL

Individual books of the Bible are referred to in the notes by the abbreviations given below; where no abbreviation is given, a book is referred to by its full title.

(i) Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis
Ex.	Exodus
Lev.	Leviticus
Num.	Numbers
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Jos.	Joshua
Jg.	Judges
1 Sam.	1 Samuel
2 Sam.	2 Samuel
1 Kg.	1 Kings
2 Kg.	2 Kings
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles
Neh.	Nehemiah
Est.	Esther
Ps.	Psalms
Pr.	Proverbs
Ec.	Ecclesiastes
S. of S.	Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)
Is.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah
Lam.	Lamentations
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Dan.	Daniel
Hos.	Hosea

ABBREVIATIONS

xiii

Jon.	Jonah
Mic.	Micah
Zech.	Zechariah
Mal.	Malachi

(ii) Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical books

Tob.	Tobit
Jdt.	Judith
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon
Sir.	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Bar.	Baruch
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees

(iii) New Testament

Mt.	Gospel of Matthew
Mk	Gospel of Mark
Lk.	Gospel of Luke
Jn	Gospel of John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom.	Epistle to the Romans
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Gal.	Galatians
Eph.	Ephesians
Phil.	Philippians
Col.	Colossians
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
1 Tim.	1 Timothy
2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Hebr.	Hebrews
1 Petr.	1 Peter
1 Jn.	1 John
2 Jn.	2 John
Rev.	Revelations

B. ANCIENT SOURCES**(i) Works by Ambrose**

<i>De ex. fratr.</i>	<i>De excessu fratris</i>
<i>De ob. Theod.</i>	<i>De obitu Theodosii</i>
<i>De ob. Val.</i>	<i>De obitu Valentiniani</i>
<i>De off.</i>	<i>De officiis</i>
<i>De paen.</i>	<i>De paenitentia</i>
<i>De virg.</i>	<i>De virginitate</i>
<i>De virgin.</i>	<i>De virginibus</i>
<i>Enarr. in ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in XII psalmos Davidicos</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep. ex.</i>	<i>Epistulae extra collectionem</i>
<i>Exh. Virg.</i>	<i>Exhortatio virginitatis</i>
<i>Expl. Ps.</i>	<i>Explanatio psalmorum</i>

(ii) Other works

<i>Acta</i>	<i>Acts of the Council of Aquileia</i>
Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus
Apuleius, <i>Met.</i>	Apuleius, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Athanasius, <i>Hist. Ar.</i>	Athanasius, <i>Historia Arianorum</i>
Augustine, <i>Civ. Dei</i>	Augustine, <i>De Civitate Dei</i>
Augustine, <i>Conf.</i>	Augustine, <i>Confessiones</i>
Augustine, <i>En.</i> <i>in Ps.</i>	Augustine, <i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>
Cato, <i>dist.</i>	Cato, <i>disticha</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Codex Justinianus</i>
<i>Coll. Avell.</i>	<i>Collectio Avellana</i>
<i>CTh</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
<i>Ep. Siricii</i>	<i>Epistula Siricii (Letter of Siricius)</i>
Epicurus, <i>Ep.</i>	Epicurus, <i>Epistulae</i>
Epicurus, <i>fr.</i>	Epicurus, fragments
Epicurus, <i>Sent.</i>	Epicurus, <i>Sententiae</i>
Eusebius, <i>HE</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Hom. <i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
Jerome, <i>Chron.</i>	Jerome, <i>Chronica (Chronicle)</i>
Jerome, <i>Lib. int.</i> <i>hebr. nom.</i>	Jerome, <i>Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

xv

Josephus <i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates Judaicae</i> (<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>)
Lact. <i>Div. Inst.</i>	Lactantius, <i>Divinae Institutiones</i> (<i>Divine Institutes</i>)
Libanius, <i>Or.</i>	Libanius, <i>Orationes</i>
Min. Fel.	Minucius Felix
<i>Mos. et Rom. Leg. Coll.</i>	<i>Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio</i>
<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Novellae</i>
Origen, <i>De princ.</i>	Origen, <i>De principiis</i> (<i>Peri Archon</i>)
Origen, <i>In Ex. hom.</i>	Origen, <i>In Exodum homiliae</i>
Origen, <i>In Rom.</i>	Origen, <i>Commentarii in Romanos</i>
Oros.	Orosius
Palladius, <i>Apol.</i>	Palladius of Ratiaria, <i>Apologia</i> (<i>Apology</i>)
<i>Pan. Lat.</i>	<i>Panegyrici Latini</i>
Paulinus, <i>V. Ambr.</i>	Paulinus of Milan, <i>Vita Ambrosii</i> (<i>Life of Ambrose</i>)
Philo, <i>Vit. Moys.</i>	Philo of Alexandria, <i>Vita Moysis</i> (<i>Life of Moses</i>)
Rufinus, <i>HE</i>	Rufinus, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Sallust, <i>Iug.</i>	Sallust, <i>Bellum Iugurthinum</i>
Seneca, <i>Ep.</i>	Seneca, <i>Epistulae</i>
Socrates, <i>HE</i>	Socrates, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Sozomen, <i>HE</i>	Sozomen, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Sulp. Sev. <i>Chron.</i>	Sulpicius Severus, <i>Chronica</i>
Symmachus, <i>Ep.</i>	Symmachus, <i>Epistulae</i>
Symmachus, <i>Rel.</i>	Symmachus, <i>Relationes</i>
Tert. <i>Apol.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Apologia</i>
Themistius, <i>Or.</i>	Themistius, <i>Orationes</i>
Theodoret, <i>HE</i>	Theodoret, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Virg. <i>Aen.</i>	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>
Virg. <i>Buc.</i>	Virgil, <i>Bucolics</i>
Virg. <i>Georg.</i>	Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>
Zos.	Zosimus

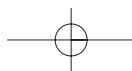
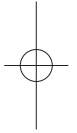
C. MODERN COLLECTIONS, JOURNALS, AND REFERENCE WORKS

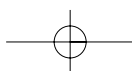
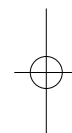
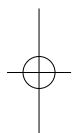
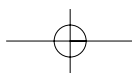
<i>Anc. Soc.</i>	<i>Ancient Society</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>CCLat</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, series Latina</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>

<i>GCS</i>	<i>De griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Mansi</i>	J. D. Mansi, <i>Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</i>
<i>MGH, AA</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
<i>Mus. Helv.</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PLRE</i>	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>RE Suppl.</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, Supplement</i>
<i>TTH</i>	<i>Translated Texts for Historians</i>
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum</i>



GENERAL INTRODUCTION





I. THE LIFE OF AMBROSE OF MILAN

1. Ambrose and the historians¹

Ambrose has always been a prominent figure in the ecclesiastical and secular histories of his age. He was also cited frequently to support positions in theological controversy. Passages from his writings taken out of their context were studied as authoritative statements of Christian doctrine. But that the life and writings of a church father such as Ambrose or Augustine should be critically examined, as the lives and writings of the great personalities of secular history and of the great secular writers are examined, is a comparatively recent phenomenon.² H. von Campenhausen, in his *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* (1929), first exposed Ambrose's political activities to the full rigour of historical method. J.-R. Palanque, in *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain* (1933), examines and assesses each of Ambrose's works critically, and sets the various writings in a chronological framework that, though in part superseded, still forms the basis for the history of his life. But when it comes to the discussion of Ambrose's place in the Church as a whole, and such issues as the beliefs and aims of Ambrose's religious opponents, or the strength of what Ambrose calls 'Arianism' in Italy, or the extent of Ambrose's influence with different emperors, Palanque is inclined to accept Ambrose's presentation uncritically. F. Homes Dudden's *Life and Times of St. Ambrose* (1935) remains in many ways an excellent book. It is closely based on the sources and covers the whole range of Ambrose's interests and

1 Recent work: H. von Campenhausen, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker*, Berlin, 1929; J.-R. Palanque, *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain*, Paris, 1933; F. H. Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1935; S. Mazzarino, *Storia sociale del vescovo Ambrogio*, Rome, 1989; Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan, Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994; D. H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts*, Oxford, 1995; R. Lizzi, 'Ambrose's Contemporaries and the Christianization of Northern Italy', *JRS* 80 (1990), 156–73.

2 R. Markus, 'Evolving disciplinary context for the study of Augustine, 1950–2000', *Augustinian Studies* 32.2 (2001), 189–200.

activities. But the fact that Dudden tries, as far as he is able, to compose his narrative out of Ambrose's own words inevitably has the result that the book on the whole reproduces Ambrose's presentation of himself, and fails to achieve a detached and critical evaluation of the aims and achievements of the bishop. Dudden and his predecessors tend to assume that Ambrose's writings are 'fundamentally transparent',¹ that they mirror the character of the author. They make insufficient allowance for the fact that all the writings, even letters seemingly addressed to an intimate friend, are works of advocacy, designed to influence the readers in a particular direction. Scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge that Ambrose rarely, if ever, was principally concerned to record simply what had happened, and that he was not a man who chose, as Augustine did, to use his skill as a writer to express the struggles and emotions of his inner life.

Another barrier between the reader and Ambrose's mind has only become apparent in the last forty years: much of his biblical exegesis was derived from Greek authors, especially from Origen, and Philo the Jew.² Hence often what we read is translation and not original thought. One factor that has changed historians' view of Ambrose has been the progressive secularisation of western society. Another important factor is the abundance of scholarly work on Late Antiquity published during the last fifty years or so.³ Thanks to this, we now have a much fuller understanding of the way imperial government worked in the fourth century. We also know much more about Ambrose's sectarian opponents, the *Homoians*, whom Ambrose invariably denounces as Arians; we know more about their doctrines, their reaction to the Council of Aquileia,⁴ as well as about the survival of *Homoians* into fifth-century Italy. McLynn's book of 1994 exploits these developments. Consequently he

1 The phrase is cited from McLynn 1994, xx.

2 P. Courcelles, *Recherches sur les "Confessions" de Saint Augustin*, 2nd edn, Paris, 1968, 106–38, 336–44; J. J. O'Meara, 'Augustine and Neo-Platonism', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958), 91–111; E. Lucchesi, *L'usage de Philon dans l'oeuvre de saint Ambroise*, 'Quellenforschung' relative aux commentaires d'Ambroise sur la Genèse, Leiden, 1977.

3 The outstanding works are A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1964, and Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, London, 1967; J. F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court, AD 364–425*, Oxford, 1975; and on the growth of the power of bishops, Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: towards a Christian Empire*, Madison, Wisconsin, 1992.

4 R. Gryson, *Scolies ariennes sur le Concile d'Aquilée*, Sources Chrétiennes 267, Paris, 1980; N. B. McLynn, 'The Apology of Palladius: Nature and Purpose', *JTS* ns 42 (1991), 52–76; M. Meslin, *Les Ariens d'Occident 335–430*, Paris, 1967; Y.-M. Duval, 'Sur l'Arianisme des Ariens d'Occident', *Mélanges de science religieuse* 26 (1969), 145–53.

has been able to locate the role of Ambrose in Church and secular society much more precisely than earlier historians have been able to do. McLynn has reassessed the significance of Ambrose's changing relations and dramatic confrontations with successive emperors, and provided a more balanced view of Ambrose's relations with those whom he considered Arians. Even if McLynn's deconstruction of Ambrose's self-presentation has perhaps sometimes gone rather far, his approach provides a lot of new insights, as well as raising new points for discussion. McLynn, like von Campenhausen before him, is mainly concerned with Ambrose the politician. But in the case of Ambrose even his politics were closely related to questions of religious doctrine, and for a fuller treatment of this aspect of the controversies of Ambrose's episcopate McLynn's book can be usefully supplemented by the slightly later work of D. H. Williams.¹ To obtain a survey of the whole range of Ambrose's activities as a theologian and pastor it is, however, still useful to read Palanque and Dudden.

2. The early years (AD 339–74)

Ambrose was born at Trier. His father, also called Ambrose, was responsible for the administration of the prefecture of the Gauls;² that is he was praetorian prefect of Gaul, probably around 339.³ If so, he was the praetorian prefect of Constantine II (337–40), and may have fallen at the same time as his emperor did. At any rate, sometime after, the widow and her children, Ambrose, his sister Marcellina and his brother Satyrus, were living at Rome. The family was evidently Roman,⁴ but like many other senatorial families they had estates in Africa,⁵ the income from which seems to have financed Ambrose's later church-building in Milan.⁶ As the son of a praetorian prefect Ambrose possessed senatorial rank. We know nothing certain about his family connections. This might suggest that his father was a self-made man, and that Ambrose had no noble relatives to boast about. But it is also the case

1 *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts*, Oxford, 1995.

2 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 3.1.

3 Palanque 1933, 480–82 on *Ep.* 49.4.

4 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 9.4; Palladius, *Apol.* 139.

5 On estates see *De ex. fratr.* 1.24. Ambrose's brother seems to have given up career and marriage in order to manage the family estates which Ambrose had given to the church of Milan.

6 A new octagonal baptistery (remains under the Piazza del Duomo), a *basilica apostolorum* (now S. Nazaro), the *basilica ambrosiana* (now S. Ambrogio), perhaps also the *basilica virginum* (now S. Simpliciano).

that the letters of his *Collection*, unlike those of, say, Pliny or Symmachus, have not been selected with a view to displaying the distinction of Ambrose's friends and relatives.¹ It is perhaps nevertheless likely that the nobility of Ambrose's family was recent, and that it was not closely linked to the great senatorial families of Rome.² The family did, however, have a Christian tradition in that it had produced one martyr, the virgin Soteris.³ Ambrose's sister Marcellina made a profession of virginity in the early 350s, and Pope Liberius himself conferred the veil upon her.⁴

Ambrose was educated at Rome in liberal studies.⁵ His writings show him to have received a thorough rhetorical education. He also acquired a good reading knowledge of Greek, something which was becoming unusual in the West. Like other well-to-do young men of good education, but not perhaps those of the highest aristocracy, Ambrose set out on a professional career.⁶ His first position was that of an advocate attached to the court of the praetorian prefect at Sirmium, a post which offered a favourable jumping-off point for a career in the imperial service. Ambrose's first imperial appointment was that of assessor to the praetorian prefect Petronius Probus. Probus was one the outstanding public figures of the time, pre-eminent through birth, wealth, and the number and elevation of the public offices he had held. Probus had entered on the third of his almost unparalleled four prefectures in the spring of 368. Though his conduct in office seems to have fallen well short of Christian precepts in many respects, Probus and his wife were committed Christians, at a time when Christians were still in a minority among the senatorial aristocracy. Praetorian prefects had a decisive say in the appointment of provincial governors, and it was Probus who procured for Ambrose the position of *consularis* of Aemelia and Liguria in 372–3.⁷ Satyrus, the brother of Ambrose, seems to have gained a governorship about the same time, perhaps with the help of the same patron. Subsequently Probus no doubt also played an important part, if behind the scenes, in the

1 See below p. 32.

2 That Symmachus was a relative is argued by T. D. Barnes, 'Augustine, Symmachus and Ambrose', in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. J. McWilliams (1992), 7–13.

3 *De Virg.* 3.38; *Exh. Virg.* 82.

4 *De Virg.* 3.1.

5 *V. Ambr.* 3.1.

6 For career paths see M. R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, Cambridge, MA, 2002, ch. 4.

7 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 8.

extraordinary events that were to be decisive for the rest of Ambrose's life, his election to be bishop of Milan in 374.¹

3. Nicenes and *Homoians* and the election of Ambrose (AD 374)

The election at Milan was complicated by the so-called Arian controversy.² To understand the issues it will be helpful to go back to the beginnings of the controversy. When the emperor Constantine was taking over the government of the East soon after his defeat of the emperor Licinius in 324, he discovered the existence of a serious rift in the Church over the problem of defining the unity and the separateness of God the Father and Jesus the Son, without seeming to abandon either one or the other of these attributes. Many of the eastern bishops sympathised with views that were being expressed by the Alexandrian priest Arius in a controversy with Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, to the effect that Jesus was in some sense subordinate to God, and in particular that there had been a time when Jesus did not exist, in other words that Jesus was part of the creation. Other bishops considered this view heresy. The matter was discussed at the Council of Nicaea in 325, which after long debate, and under pressure from the emperor, came out with the definition that the Father and the Son were of the same substance (*homoousios*), and condemned the propositions that the Son was in any way inferior to the Father, and that He belonged to the created order. This did not settle the issue, and the Church became even more deeply divided between those who accepted the Nicene definition, most prominent among whom was Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, and those who passionately rejected it.³ The *Homoousians* referred to those who rejected the Nicene definition as Arians and heretics. Their opponents naturally thought of themselves as orthodox, and many, or even most of them, rejected the suggestion that they shared the views of Arius, i.e. that they could fairly be described as 'Arians'.⁴ After Constantine's death, his son Constantius made strenuous

1 V. *Ambr.* 8.

2 R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–81*, Edinburgh, 1988; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edn, London, 1972.

3 T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, Cambridge, MA, 1993.

4 On the 'creation' of 'Arianism', see the study of R. Lyman, 'A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism', in M. R. Barnes and D. H. Williams (eds) *Arianism after Arius*, Edinburgh, 1993, 45–62.

and sustained efforts to restore Church unity. He summoned a succession of synods, and applied the whole weight of imperial authority to compel bishops to sign a compromise, which abandoned the controversial definition of *homoousios*, and defined the relationship as 'similar' (*homoios*). As far as Italy was concerned, the decisive synod was the Council of Rimini (Ariminum) of 359. Henceforth, and at least until the death of Constantius in 361, the great majority of bishops of Italy and Illyricum were at least formally united around the *Homoian* definition. Bishops who rejected the formula were deposed and in exile.

What happened after Constantius' death is not clear. The great bulk of our sources for ecclesiastical history were written by Nicenes, the ultimate victors in the conflict. These represent the *Homoian* consensus reached at the council of Rimini as insincere and superficial and even fraudulent, and insist that it was entirely the result of pressure by the imperial authorities. The Nicene sources do not therefore provide the information which might enable a reader to reach an independent assessment of the extent of *Homoian* Christianity in Italy. They do not even provide a clear account of how and why *Homoian* Christianity was eventually rejected by the bishops of Italy. As far as the Nicene writers are concerned, the Italian bishops, with only a very few exceptions, returned to the Nicene definition (*homoousios*) as soon as they were free to do so. Much of the older scholarship simply accepted this view.

However, more recently scholars have examined the fragments of *Homoian* literature that have come down to us more closely,¹ and reached the conclusion that *Homoian* Christianity in Italy had deeper roots and a more enduring following than the Nicene authors, of whom Ambrose is of course the most prominent, would allow. It now seems clear that the *Homoian* belief did win a significant number of committed followers among the native population of Italy and that its survival through the last decades of the fourth century, and well beyond that, did not depend on refugees from the Balkans and Gothic soldiery. The evidence is too fragmentary to assess the numbers or the geographical spread of these *Homoian* communities. It remains the case, however, that we know of only a small number of cities in Italy that still had a *Homoian* bishop in the decades after the death of the emperor Constantius.² But these remaining bishops appear

1 References in Williams 1995, 83–84, see also n. 6 above.

2 Williams 1995, 73–76: Zosimus of Naples, Florentius of Puteoli, Urbanus of Parma and of course Auxentius of Milan.

to have been firmly entrenched. Outstanding among them was Auxentius of Milan, who, as we will see, successfully resisted several determined attempts to depose him. On the other hand Damasus, the bishop of Rome, was strongly Nicene, and he was able to assemble synods of Italian bishops adhering to the Nicene definition, and ready to vote for the deposition of bishops whom they considered to be Arians.¹ We may suspect that the great majority of bishops simply kept silent, without making any open commitment to either point of view, and tacitly rejoined the *Homoiousians* when it became politic to do so.²

Auxentius had been made bishop of Milan in 355 after Constantius had deposed and exiled the *Homoiousian* bishop Dionysius. Though the beginning of his episcopate was contentious, Auxentius clearly became strongly established at Milan. In the 360s Filastrius, who was later to become bishop of Brescia, tried to organise his overthrow, but failed and was driven out of the city. In 364 Hilary of Poitiers accused Auxentius of heresy, and the emperor Valentinian appointed a jury of ten bishops and two high officials to hear the charges. The charges were rejected. Valentinian compelled Hilary to leave Milan.³ Subsequently two successive synods called by Pope Damasus condemned Auxentius. Auxentius remained bishop notwithstanding. But when Auxentius died in 374, a bitter conflict arose at Milan between *Homoians* and Nicenes over the question whether a *Homoian* or a Nicene should succeed him. The sharpness of the division may well have been a result of the fact that Auxentius had been imposed by force, with the result that a section of the city remained hostile to him, continuing to be loyal to the memory of the deposed Dionysius, even though Auxentius proved to be a good bishop,⁴ who had built up a great personal following. It was presumably the existence of this group of Nicene loyalists, who still resented the deposition of their bishop, which had encouraged first Filastrius, and subsequently Hilary of Poitiers, to try to

1 Williams 1995, 80: synods in 369/70 and 370; and Ambrose *Ep. ex. 7*, p. 244 below, on synod of 378.

2 As Zosimus of Naples is reported to have done in *Ep. Marcellini et Faustini (Liber Precum)* II. 62 (CSEL 35.23).

3 See Hilary of Poitiers, *Contra Auxentium* 7–9 (PL 10.2, 613–15) and McLynn 1994, 24–27. But Timothy Barnes, ‘Valentinian, Auxentius and Ambrose’, *Historia* 51 (2002), 227–37, argues that the bishops served as advisers to the officials who were the judges.

4 It seems that it was Auxentius who built the great new cathedral of Milan, the so-called *Basilica Nova* (see below p. 161 and McLynn 1994, 28). If so, he probably received a heavy imperial subsidy.

get Auxentius deposed. Though Auxentius and his supporters had been too strong, the Nicene group continued to exist, and it maintained a martyr-cult of its own, the cult of the 'Innocents'.¹ As long as Auxentius was alive, and protected by the emperor Valentinian I, the Nicenes remained helpless. When he died they evidently made a determined effort to get a *Homoousian* bishop elected. Serious riots threatened when a large and deeply divided crowd had filled the cathedral to acclaim a new bishop. Ambrose, in his capacity of provincial governor, entered the church to restore calm. He succeeded, but only because the two factions united to acclaim him. Ambrose tried various devices to escape the election, but in vain. When even the emperor Valentinian promised his support Ambrose yielded. He was quickly baptised, and promoted through all the grades of the priesthood within the week. At the end of the week he was consecrated bishop. This appears to be more or less what happened, but the story nevertheless leaves many questions unanswered, and indeed unanswerable with any degree of certainty.²

Ambrose's position, as newly consecrated bishop, was not an easy one. He had no theological training, lacked pastoral experience, and he was in charge of a divided community. Moreover a large part of his clergy must have had *Homoian* sympathies, while he was a Nicene, as he had already made clear by insisting that he must be baptised by a Nicene priest. There is no doubt that he worked hard to make good his deficiencies in biblical knowledge and theology, using his knowledge of Greek to read Greek works which his otherwise better qualified clerics were unable to read. He was tactful. As bishop he could not avoid preaching, and being a master of rhetoric he will not have wanted to. But for the first two years of his episcopacy he did not produce any written works. His first book, the *De Virginitate*, was written in 377.³ It was not about any controversial question of theology, but dealt with a theme on which *Homoians* and Nicenes were agreed, one moreover which Ambrose was to emphasise throughout his episcopate: the high value of virginity. The contents were not entirely new. The book is based on a sermon Ambrose himself had delivered on St Agnes' day, and on another that Pope Liberius had delivered during the service of consecration of Ambrose's sister Marcellina.

1 On their execution by Valentinian in a case that seemingly had nothing to do with religion, see Amm. Marc. 27.7.5 and McLynn 1994, 29–31.

2 McLynn 1994, 42–52, 'deconstructs' and plausibly reconstructs the full story, but his is not the only possible reconstruction. Barnes 2000 argues that McLynn exaggerates the strength of *Homoianism* among the Milanese laity.

3 *De Virg.* 1.1.3; 2.6.39.

In the following year Ambrose held two orations to honour his recently deceased brother Satyrus, and published them under the title of *Books of Consolation and Resurrection*.¹ Satyrus was buried in the chapel of the martyr Victor next to the basilica which Ambrose was building, and in which he himself was to be buried, today's Sant' Ambrogio. Satyrus was later canonised. His tomb can still be seen in the chapel.

4. Ambrose under Gratian (AD 378–83)

The year 378 was a turning point in the history of the Roman Empire, for it was in that year that the Goths destroyed the eastern emperor Valens together with his army at the battle of Adrianople. It was also, at least according to the view argued in this volume,² a turning point in the episcopate of Ambrose. In this year he took part in a synod assembled at Rome by Pope Damasus, and afterwards was delegated to carry the synod's petition to the emperor Gratian at Sirmium. There he made the acquaintance of Gratian, and was asked by him to write the theological treatise 'On the Faith'. Ambrose immediately composed the first two books of what eventually became a five-book treatise. The work is a fierce attack on the *Homoian* position, branding it as Arian.³ It was probably around the same time, that is early in 379, that Ambrose consecrated the Nicene Anemius as bishop at Sirmium to succeed the recently deceased *Homoian* bishop Germinius. Henceforth bitter hostility existed between Ambrose and the *Homoians*.⁴

On 19 January 378 Theodosius I had been proclaimed emperor of the East. Some time later Theodosius and Gratian agreed that Theodosius should be responsible for the government and defence of the whole region affected by the Gothic invasion. This meant that eastern Illyricum ceased to be subject to Gratian.⁵ It was probably this which induced Justina, the

1 *Expl. Ps.* 1. 51.

2 See below pp. 246–47 (Introduction to *Ep. ex. 7*). A very different, but in itself consistent, view is argued by McLynn 1994, 90–99, who favours the view that Gratian remained basically neutral as between Nicenes and *Homoians*, and therefore critically distant from Ambrose more or less until he transferred his residence to Milan in spring 381.

3 It does not read at all like a personal justification. Otherwise McLynn 1994, 98.

4 D. H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflict*, Oxford, 1995, 148–53, and with a slightly different emphasis in 'Ambrose, Emperors and *homoians* in Milan: The First Conflict over a Basilica', in Barnes and Williams 1993, 127–46.

5 Sozomen 7.4; see P. Heather, *Goths and Romans 332–489*, Oxford, 1991, 149–50.

widow of Valentinian I, and her son,¹ the eight-year-old Valentinian II, to leave Sirmium and set up residence in Milan. This move on the part of the empress mother caused difficulties for Ambrose, because Justina was an Arian, or at least a *Homoian*, and a considerable part of her military escort consisted of Goths who were of the same persuasion. Milan certainly had a significant number of committed *Homoians* already, but their numbers and influence were now considerably increased. Gratian recognised this situation by ordering Ambrose to allow the *Homoians* the use of one church, and on this occasion Ambrose yielded though no doubt most reluctantly.² In return Gratian appears to have tried to placate Ambrose by setting some kind of limit to *Homoian* activities. Gratian's letter to Ambrose, and Ambrose's reply to that letter,³ are the principal sources for what remains a very unclear situation. By now Ambrose was an active pamphleteer on the Nicene side. He compiled three further books on the Faith (winter 379/80?), and a treatise in three books on the Holy Spirit, once more responding to a request for a treatise on this topic from the emperor Gratian (spring 381). This was the time when Gratian transferred his residence from Trier to Milan, a move which greatly increased the importance of the city and its bishop. Theodosius was about to hold the Council of Constantinople, whose decisions were to settle once and for all the relations between Empire and Church in the East on the basis of the Nicene faith. Gratian had been given no part in this transaction. He promptly called a council to meet in the West at Aquileia. But he soon realised that this council would be in no way a match for the Council of Constantinople, so he reduced its scope to the settlement of the problem of the *Homoian* bishops of Illyricum. He encouraged sick and elderly bishops and bishops from the more remote western provinces to stay away. In the event the bishops who assembled at Aquileia in September 381 not only did not include any representatives of the East, but were scarcely representative of the bishops of the West outside Italy, or even of the whole of Italy. Thus the council's decisions could not possibly claim the authority of an ecumenical council, but its authority, backed as it was by Gratian, was enough to enable Ambrose to achieve the condemnation of the two most important of the remaining

1 It is not certain that Valentinian was living at Sirmium with Justina. Ammianus tells us that Valentinian was educated by his uncle Gratian (30.10.6), and if this is taken literally, he must have lived for some years at Gratian's court at Trier.

2 *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.1.21.

3 See below pp. 270–77.

Homoian bishops, Palladius of Ratiaria (Arcăr) and Secundianus of Singidunum (Belgrade). A fragment of the acts of the council has survived, and shows the proceedings to have been heavily biased against the *Homoian* bishops.¹ After the council Ambrose wrote letters to the emperors in the name of the bishops, asking for the council's decisions to be enforced.² Palladius and Secundianus were duly deposed. This outcome showed that the Nicenes were now the dominant faction in Italy and Illyricum, with Nicenes in possession of the churches everywhere, and Gratian from his residence at Milan was giving them full support. Nevertheless *Homoians* continued to meet, and to produce apologetic literature both at Milan and elsewhere.³ Palladius, though he had been deprived of his see, was able to write at least two pamphlets, one criticising Ambrose's *on Faith*, the other defending his own position with a devastating attack on Ambrose's behaviour at the council of Aquileia.⁴ As for Ambrose, his dominant role at the council shows that he had succeeded in establishing a position of leadership among the bishops of northern Italy which was comparable to that exercised by metropolitan bishops in the East, and by the bishop of Carthage in North Africa. However, when Ambrose attempted to assert the authority of himself and his council in the ecclesiastical affairs of the East by challenging decisions of the Council of Constantinople, his demands were simply rejected by Theodosius.

About a year later, in autumn 382, Gratian withdrew the state funding of the ancient priesthoods and cults of the city of Rome, and he ordered the altar and the statue of Victory to be removed from the senate-chamber. When an embassy from the senate requested him to reverse these acts, he refused to do so, and resigned the title of *pontifex maximus*, which all previous emperors had borne, and which signified that the emperor was head of

1 CSEL LXXXIII.10.3.315–68; there is a translation, *The Letters of Ambrose Bishop of Milan*, in A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Oxford, 1881, 31–62, also in a volume by McLynn in the Translated Texts for Historians series (Liverpool: forthcoming). Interestingly the manuscript on which all others are based also contains fragments of the pamphlets of Palladius, and of the *Dissertatio* on the Council of Aquileia of the fifth-century Arian theologian Maximinus.

2 See *Ep. ex.* 4, 5, 6, 9, 8 below.

3 Williams 1995, 185–94.

4 N. McLynn, 'The Apology of Palladius: Nature and Purpose', *JTS* 42 (1991), 52–76. The text is edited in R. Gryson, *Scolies ariennes sur le concile d'Aquilée*, Sources Chrétiennes 267, Paris, 1980, 264–325.

the religion of the Roman state.¹ Gratian's action was essentially symbolic, but it symbolised a change of great significance, for it formally severed the link between the Roman state and its ancestral religion. This was a step which Constantine had refrained from taking, and which marks the moment when Christianity advanced from being the religion of the emperor to be the religion of the Empire. The influence of Ambrose has been credited or blamed for this measure. He denied that he had been responsible for the decision.² There is no evidence to contradict him, and the disestablishment of pagan cults could surely have come about without Ambrose's intervention. It was bound to take place sooner or later. Christianisation had a powerful momentum. But the disestablishment of pagan cults is something that Ambrose must always have wanted, and when the pagan senators were about to send a delegation to urge Gratian to change his mind and reverse the measure, and Pope Damasus had compiled a counter-petition of Christian senators, it was Ambrose who presented the Christian petition to Gratian, with the outcome that the emperor refused to see the pagan delegation.³

5. Ambrose under Valentinian II and the empress Justina (AD 383–87)

Gratian did not long survive the disestablishment of the ancestral cults. As we have seen he had in 381 transferred his residence from Trier to Milan. The departure of the emperor caused discontent in Gaul, and this encouraged Magnus Maximus, the commander of the army in Britain, to cross the Channel, and proclaim himself emperor. Gratian was deserted by his troops, and killed on 25 August 383. This left the twelve-year-old emperor Valentinian II and his mother Justina as rulers in Italy. Experienced ministers and officers rallied round the orphaned boy emperor to carry on his government, but his position was nevertheless extremely shaky. One of the first moves of the new government was to send Ambrose as an envoy to Maximus to restrain him from invading Italy immediately. The mission was successful. We have Ambrose's own account of some of it in *Ep.* 30.⁴ The letter raises many questions, but it does suggest that one of the issues discussed was a demand of Maximus that Valentinian should travel to Gaul, and put himself under the usurper's protection. It appears that Ambrose gave Maximus the

1 Alan Cameron, 'Gratian's Repudiation of the Pontifical Robe', *JRS* 58 (1968), 96–102.

2 *Ep.* ex. 10.2.

3 *Ep.* 72a.10.

4 See below p. 349.

impression that Valentinian would indeed come, and in this way induced Maximus not to launch an immediate invasion. The new government in Italy was given time to consolidate its position.

Meanwhile the fact that disaster had struck Gratian, and what was in practice¹ the accession of a new emperor, encouraged the pagan senators of Rome to make a second attempt get the altar of Victory and the public subsidies for the state cult restored. Symmachus, the foremost orator of his time and prefect of the city, composed an eloquent petition and sent it to the emperor.² When Ambrose was informed of this, he instantly wrote a letter to the emperor³ to oppose the petition. Ambrose's letter was read in the imperial consistory, and Symmachus' petition rejected. Subsequently, though the matter had already been decided, Ambrose composed a formal oration refuting Symmachus' argument point by point, and incidentally challenging comparison with the memorandum of Symmachus as a masterpiece of rhetoric.⁴ The fact that a weak government could simply reject a petition of the senate of Rome introduced by the prefect of Rome, and backed by representatives of some of the wealthiest and most aristocratic families in the Empire, is a striking demonstration of how far the balance of influence and power had by now shifted from paganism to Christianity.

The disappearance of Gratian, and the consequent rise to power of Valentinian II, his mother Justina and their advisers provided a considerable boost to the *Homoians* in Italy and for not less than a year, from summer 385 to summer 386, Ambrose was involved in a serious conflict with the imperial authorities. At Milan the *Homoians* were now led by a refugee from the Balkans, a second Auxentius, who had been bishop of Durostorum (Silistra) on the Danube, and they were exploiting the sympathy which they currently enjoyed at court to improve their position. Ambrose saw their increased activity as a challenge, and reacted accordingly. The court, in its turn, sustained a serious campaign to make life unpleasant for Ambrose; indeed it eventually tried to force him to go into 'voluntary' exile. Much detail of this conflict remains obscure, though we have four letters of Ambrose dealing with it.⁵ The letters are vivid, and detailed, but they do not give a complete account of the course of events or of the issues involved. This is because the

1 Formally Valentinian II had been an emperor since 375.

2 *Ep.* 72a.

3 *Ep.* 72.

4 *Ep.* 73.

5 *Epp.* 75a, 75, 76 and 77.

letters are focused mainly, and almost certainly misleadingly, on only one aspect of the dispute: repeated attempts by the government to get Ambrose to hand over a church for services of the *Homoian* sect. In the course of this famous conflict Ambrose defied the emperor as few individuals, who did not become outright rebels, had ever defied any Roman emperor. That Ambrose got away with this behaviour, without yielding any point of principle, must have been due in large measure to the fact that he was known to have many supporters among the people of Milan, and what was more important, among some units of the imperial army.

Two developments put an end to the crisis. In summer 386 Ambrose proclaimed that he had found the bodies of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius, and arranged for them to be buried with great ceremony under the altar of the basilica which was to become his own sepulchre, and which has ever since borne his name, Sant'Ambrogio. Ambrose professed to believe, and in all likelihood did sincerely believe, that the fact that he had been allowed to find martyrs was a sign that God approved of the stand he had taken, and he publicised it, so that as many people as possible should know that God approved of what their bishop had been doing.¹ Meanwhile the precarious peace between Valentinian II in Italy and Magnus Maximus in Gaul was breaking down, and Maximus was once more threatening to invade. A case that is plausible, but far from conclusive, has been made for dating Ambrose's second embassy to Maximus to this time.² The scenario would then be as follows: the government of Valentinian responded to the threats of Maximus by sending Ambrose to Trier a second time. The stated purpose of Ambrose's mission was to persuade Maximus to release the body of Gratian for burial in Italy,³ but on this view Valentinian also hoped that Ambrose would be able to repeat the success of his first mission, and prevent an invasion of Italy. We have a letter from Ambrose to Valentinian which purports to be a report on his embassy, but it tells us very little about the actual course of negotiations between Ambrose and Maximus (at least that is the view argued in the Appendix). Even the date of the embassy is uncertain. It is in fact more likely to have taken place in 384–5 than in 386.⁴

But even if Ambrose did go on his second embassy to Trier in 386, and did attempt for a second time to prevent an invasion of Italy by Maximus,

1 *Ep.* 77.1–2.

2 McLynn 1994, 160–63, 217–18.

3 *De obitu Valentiniani*, 28.

4 *Ep.* 30 and the discussion on p. 349 below.

the attempt failed. Maximus invaded Italy in summer 387, and Valentinian fled to Thessalonica, that is to the protection of his own Balkan armies, and of the Eastern army of Theodosius.

6. Ambrose under Theodosius I (AD 388–395)¹

For about a year Ambrose shared Milan with Magnus Maximus. We have no evidence bearing on the bishop's relations with the usurper. Then in summer 388 the armies of Theodosius and Valentinian defeated Maximus, and the victorious Theodosius and his court spent the next three years in Italy, much of the time at Milan. This was the beginning of a fascinating relationship. It does seem as if Ambrose now established a remarkable ascendancy over the emperor, which the latter occasionally resented, but could not shake off. It must have been very early during Theodosius' stay at Milan that the emperor joined the priests at the altar to receive communion, as he was accustomed to do at Constantinople, but was ordered by Ambrose to take his place among the laymen.² The next recorded contact between Ambrose and Theodosius is the strange affair of the synagogue at Callinicum. The *comes Orientis* had reported that a synagogue at Callinicum, a fortress on the border of Mesopotamia, had been burnt by some monks, at the instigation of the local bishop. When the emperor ordered the guilty to be punished, and the bishop to rebuild the synagogue, Ambrose somehow heard about this order, and launched a protest. The emperor gave way to the point of cancelling the command that the bishop must rebuild the synagogue,³ but he still insisted that the perpetrators must be punished. Encouraged by the success of his first initiative, Ambrose now wrote a long and carefully composed letter to Theodosius asking him to cancel the punishment as well.⁴ When this letter did not have the desired effect, Ambrose used the fact that the emperor was attending one of his services to repeat the request: as he finished his sermon, he told Theodosius that he would not give him communion, unless he forgave the people who had destroyed the synagogue. Theodosius gave way, and duly received communion.

This is an astonishing episode, at least if it really happened precisely in the way Ambrose has described it to his sister.⁵ Not only does it show

1 See H. Leppin, *Theodosius der Grosse*, Darmstadt, 2003.

2 Sozomen, *HE* 7.25.9

3 *Ep.* 74.9

4 *Ep.* 74

5 *Ep. ex.* 1.26–28.

Ambrose in a bad light, and surely not only to modern sensibilities, but one also wonders why Ambrose risked a confrontation with an emperor over what was essentially a symbolic issue,¹ and why Theodosius let himself be bullied into an action which was quite contrary to all traditions of Roman administration.² Perhaps the episode did not after all happen quite in the way Ambrose has described it in his two letters. But whatever really happened, Ambrose would surely not have taken the risk if he had not already established a sufficiently close relationship with the emperor³ to be sure that his intervention would not incur his lasting anger. Around the same time, or perhaps a little later, Ambrose intervened again, this time to frustrate the efforts of yet another delegation sent by the Roman senate to petition Theodosius to reverse the disestablishment of the Roman state cults.⁴ Again Theodosius yielded to Ambrose's protest, even though he was at the same time making considerable efforts to win the support of the Roman nobility for his regime in Italy. But Theodosius did resent Ambrose's intervention after the event, for he gave the order that the bishop should henceforth not receive any information about proceedings in the imperial consistory.⁵

There followed the most famous of Ambrose's confrontations with the secular power. In retaliation for the murder of a *magister militum* at Thessalonica a large number of civilians had been massacred in that city. Theodosius had not explicitly ordered what happened, but it was an order of his which had made the massacre possible, and he came to feel sufficiently guilty to issue a law that henceforth the carrying out of a sentence of capital punishment should be deferred thirty days.⁶ As soon as Ambrose was informed about the massacre he wrote to the emperor, urging him that sin must be followed by penance, and warning him that unless Theodosius did penance for the massacre, he would be unable to give him the sacrament.

1 If Ambrose had not raised the topic nobody would have heard about the synagogue of Callinicum, and in any case it must have been very questionable how far the emperor in Milan could, even if he wanted to, exercise close control over a law and order affair on the eastern border of the Empire.

2 Neither Ambrose's demand nor Theodosius' response, baptised Christian though he was, could surely be considered 'normal' at that time.

3 *Ep. ex.* 1.1 refers to the numerous benefits which the emperor had bestowed on third parties at Ambrose's request.

4 *Ep. ex.* 10.4.

5 *Ep. ex.* 11.1–2.

6 *CTh* 9.40.13 9 (August 390?)

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

19

This is the essential message of a long and skilful letter.¹ Theodosius complied. He confessed his sin. He did public penance² by appearing in church without his crown, and he was readmitted to the sacraments after the period of penance had elapsed. This is an altogether extraordinary and unique incident. It is anachronistic to dismiss it as essentially a brilliant piece of public relations.³ It was surely necessary for a bishop of exceptionally strong personality to confront a pious emperor, genuinely weighed down by a sense of guilt. It is moreover very difficult to believe that the very sharp laws issued shortly after, prohibiting sacrifice in Italy⁴ and in Egypt⁵ were not the product of the same situation.⁶

Theodosius now returned to Constantinople. He had sent Valentinian II together with the *magister militum* Arbogast and what was left of the Western mobile army to Gaul. This left a power vacuum in Italy. When a barbarian invasion from Pannonia seemed imminent, there was panic in northern Italy. At Milan people were urging Ambrose to travel to Gaul to ask Valentinian to come and defend Italy with his army.⁷ In fact Valentinian began preparations for moving into Italy even before Ambrose could set out for Gaul.⁸ But Arbogast appears to have prevented Valentinian from leaving. Then Valentinian wrote to Ambrose begging him to come to Gaul and baptise him,⁹ and to mediate between himself and his commander-in-chief.¹⁰ Ambrose was about to start for Gaul when the news came that Valentinian was dead. It was then, and still is, uncertain whether he committed suicide or was murdered, though Ambrose seems to have thought that it was suicide. The episode remains dark, in every sense. Ambrose exchanged letters with Theodosius on the subject of

1 See McLynn 1994, 322–27.

2 *De obitu Theodosii* 34.

3 McLynn 1994, 315–30, in a very acute analysis, perhaps exaggerates the public relations aspect.

4 *CTh* 16.10.10 (24 February 391).

5 *CTh* 16.10.11.

6 Otherwise McLynn 1994, 333–34.

7 *De ob. Val.* 24.

8 *De ob. Val.* 24, cf. McLynn 1994, 336 n.152.

9 *Ep.* 25 (53).

10 So Palanque, *Saint Ambroise*, 268 on *De ob. Val.* 25, but McLynn 1994, 336 n.153 interprets the obscure phrase, ‘You wished to have me as a pledge of your good faith towards your companion (*vadem fidei tuae habere me apud comitem tuum velles*)’, to mean that Ambrose was to offer Arbogast a formal pledge that moving into Italy would not be treated as treason by Theodosius.

the burial of Valentinian.¹ The young emperor was eventually buried in an improvised coffin in Milan. Ambrose delivered the address.²

On the death of Valentinian, Arbogast arranged for Eugenius, an elderly civil servant, to be proclaimed emperor (AD 392). Ambrose was once more faced with the problem of how to behave to a usurper. For a time he avoided having to display any attitude towards the new ruler by not answering the letters with which Eugenius attempted to open communications, though he did write letters in support of individuals who sought favours from the new emperor. When Eugenius came to Italy in spring 393 and took up residence at Milan, Ambrose withdrew from Milan, first to Bologna, then to Florence.³ He may well have doubted whether Eugenius would be able to maintain his position against Theodosius. He had also learnt that Eugenius was not sound on the religious issue. Eugenius was a Christian, but in a bid to win the support of influential pagan senators at Rome he omitted to enforce the anti-pagan legislation of Gratian and Theodosius. Moreover when petitioned by yet another embassy of pagan senators to repeal the measures of Gratian, though he did not restore the confiscated revenues to the temples, he did give them as a present to individual members of the embassy. It was because he had anticipated this act, so Ambrose was to claim in a letter he wrote to Eugenius, that he had withdrawn from Milan.⁴

In summer 394 Theodosius moved against Eugenius, and proceeded to defeat Arbogast, who commanded the usurper's army, at the battle of the river Frigidus in September 394. Theodosius seems to have written to Ambrose very soon after the battle, at any rate before Ambrose had returned to Milan. The letter has not been preserved. Ambrose's defensive reply suggests that Theodosius had hinted that Ambrose's continued absence from Milan might be thought to indicate lack of confidence in Theodosius' victory, and also that in any case it was not right for a bishop to leave his flock. But the main purpose of the letter was to ask Ambrose to arrange a service of thanksgiving. Ambrose was naturally eager to resume relations, and he replied with three letters in close succession, of which two have been preserved.⁵ He asks

1 *Ep.* 25(53).

2 *De obitu Valentiniani*, in *CSEL* 73, 369–401; text, translation, and commentary entitled *Liber de consolatione Valentiani*, ed. T.A. Kelly, Washington, DC, 1940. Also translated below, pp. 358–99. On suicide, see below p. 386 n. 4.

3 *Exhortatio virginitatis* 2–8.

4 *Ep. ex.* 10.

5 *Epp. ex.* 2 and 3.

Theodosius to pardon the followers of Eugenius. Theodosius duly pardoned, or perhaps advised his son Honorius¹ to pardon, most of the principal followers of the usurper,² only compelling some to repay the salary they had received in his service. Whether moved by his own conscience, or under the influence of Ambrose, or a combination of both, Theodosius felt polluted by the blood spilt in the recent civil war, so that he did not present himself for communion for some time, not in fact until the arrival in Italy of his son Honorius, which he interpreted as a sign that the favour of God had been restored to him.³

7. The last years of Ambrose's episcopate (AD 395–97)

Theodosius did not long survive his victory over Eugenius, dying in January 395. Before the body was dispatched to Constantinople for burial, a service was held at Milan attended by Honorius, Stilicho⁴ and most of the Theodosian establishment in Italy. Ambrose gave the address *On the death of Theodosius*, a very carefully composed work, designed both to assist Honorius – and Stilicho – to establish their government in the West, and to praise Theodosius as the ideal emperor, above all in his handling of the relations of Church and state. It is surely precisely because it paints the portrait of a ruler who carried out his obligations to the Church in an exemplary manner that Ambrose included the address in his *Collection* of letters.⁵

Throughout his episcopate Ambrose had cultivated relations with the bishops of northern Italy and beyond. The letters to bishops illustrate how

¹ Theodosius' second son was born in 384, and received the title of Augustus in 393, but remained at Constantinople while his father campaigned against Eugenius. On Theodosius' death he became ruler of the West.

² *De ob. Theod.* 4; *CTh* 15.14.11 (18 May 395), 15.14.12 (17 June 395). But the younger Flavianus was asked to repay the salary his father had received as praetorian prefect from Eugenius (*Symmachus, Ep.* IV.19, 51; V. 47; VI.12); as was Marcianus, perhaps Eugenius' proconsul of Africa (*Symmachus, Ep.* III. 33).

³ *De ob. Theod.* 41.

⁴ The commander-in-chief of the army (*magister militum praesentalis*) and the most powerful individual in the West. His wife was a niece of Theodosius and he acted as guardian of Honorius, claiming that Theodosius had wished him to be guardian to both his sons. See *PLRE* 1.853–8 s.v. Stilicho.

⁵ *De ob. Theod.* 5 seems to confirm Stilicho's assertion that Theodosius had commended both sons to his guardianship, which he made a basis for a claim to exercise a regent's authority not only in the West but in the East also.

⁶ See below p. 176.

Ambrose operated on the level of personal relationships. One way he built up links with episcopal colleagues was by giving advice, sometimes asked, sometimes no doubt unasked, as for instance on the proper date for celebrating Easter.¹ When a bishop in the region died Ambrose was regularly ready to take a leading part in the consecration of the successor.² Similarly he showed himself eager to consecrate bishops in cities which so far had had none.³ So he gradually and informally acquired a position among the bishops of northern Italy comparable to that of the pope in Italia Suburbicaria, and of the metropolitan bishops in the East. His authority was still to a considerable extent personal, and the boundaries of his sphere of influence remained flexible, but the special position of the church of Milan among the churches of northern Italy which Ambrose had created became permanent.⁴ At the time of his death Ambrose's personal influence stretched well beyond Italy. Thus, presumably in cooperation with Pope Siricius, he got Theodosius to call a synod of bishops at Capua in 391/2 to settle the Antiochene schism. This attempt failed,⁵ but the synod had other business too. It was asked by the bishops of Macedonia to judge the case of Bishop Bonosus, who, it was alleged, denied the virginity of Mary. Ambrose, replying on behalf of the synod after the bishops had dispersed, emphatically asserts the virginity of the Virgin Mary but insists that Bonosus must be judged by his colleagues in Macedonia.⁶ Not much later Pope Siricius informed Ambrose that he had excommunicated Jovinian and certain of his followers for holding beliefs concerning the virgin Mary very similar to those Bonosus was alleged to hold. He asks Ambrose and other north Italian bishops to support the excommunication.⁷ Ambrose thereupon called an assembly of northern bishops, and they jointly agreed to join the pope in the excommunication of Jovinian. Then Ambrose informed Siricius on behalf of the bishops what the synod had decided.⁸ Shortly before he died

1 E.g. *Ep. ex.* 13: to the bishops in the province of Aemilia on the date of Easter; or *Ep. ex.* 14: to the electors of a bishop of Vercelli.

2 E.g. *Ep. ex.* 14.

3 R. Lizzi, 'Ambrose's Contemporaries and the Christianization of Northern Italy', *JRS* 80 (1990), 156–73.

4 M. Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed*, Oxford, 1999, 147–53. R. Lizzi, *Vescovi e strutture ecclesiastiche nella città tardoantica (l'Italia Annonaria nel IV-V secolo d.C.)*, Como, 1989.

5 On the circumstances cf. McLynn 1994, 334–35.

6 *Ep.* 71.

7 *Ep. Siricii*. See below p. 336.

8 *Ep. ex.* 15.

a queen of the Marcomanni asked Ambrose by letter how she might come to believe. Ambrose's reply was framed in the form of a catechism, but it also included the advice to the king her husband that he should keep peace with the Romans. The queen later travelled to Milan to see Ambrose, but by the time she came, he was no longer alive. He had died on Easter Sunday 397.¹

The deeper layers of Ambrose's personality are elusive. One cannot be sure what really motivated him. Late Roman rhetoric was by its nature impersonal, and Ambrose was evidently not somebody who made his deepest feelings public. He was in this quite unlike Augustine or Jerome, more like Julius Caesar, or in our days General de Gaulle. Moreover he was every inch a politician, and a very highly gifted politician at that. He certainly was a master of self-presentation, of political 'spin', a talent which our generation is exceptionally well qualified to recognise. But a man who does as much, and writes as much, as Ambrose did cannot avoid giving away something of the kind of man he is. Ambrose certainly drove himself extremely hard. He was active in ecclesiastical and imperial politics, but he also took his pastoral duties extremely seriously. In addition he read a great deal on theological and moral topics. A lot of his letters are about his reading, for he was concerned to pass on to others what his own reading had taught him, particular his reading of Greek authors. As a writer and theologian Ambrose was a 'high populariser' rather than an original thinker. Ambrose's works fill four volumes in the *Patrologia Latina*. He wrote commentaries on parts of the *Book of Genesis*, on some of the psalms, and on the *Gospel according to Luke*. He wrote a book *On the Duties of Ministers*. He wrote books *On the Faith* and *On the Holy Spirit* and many shorter treatises and sermons, including *On the Lord's Incarnation*, *An Explanation of the Creed*, *On the Sacraments*, *On Repentance*, as well as hymns and letters.²

As there were not many original theologians writing in Latin, and even fewer who read Greek easily, Ambrose's writings became accepted in the Latin West, as he no doubt intended them to become accepted, as an authoritative exposition of the doctrines of the Church and of the duties of its priesthood; and they remained so in the West through the Middle Ages. In his role of translator of Greek one might think of Ambrose as a Christian Cicero. He may well have thought this himself.³ He wrote eloquent but not

1 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 36.

2 For a survey of his writings see Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose*, London and New York, 1997, 55–68.

3 See Introduction and notes in I. J. Davidson, *Ambrose: De Officiis*, Oxford, 2002.

outstanding prose, but he was an original poet and he has the reputation of having produced the first Christian hymns to be written in Latin,¹ and very fine hymns they are.² Indeed Ambrose started liturgical hymn-singing in the West. He was of course also extremely pugnacious and aggressive, and it is in character that he introduced hymn-singing in a situation of confrontation: in the course of his conflict with Valentinian II and Justina, when his church was surrounded by troops, Ambrose kept up the morale of his congregation by getting them to sing hymns, until his opponents gave in. Churches everywhere quickly took up the innovation.³

Ambrose's personality must have been enormously impressive. In his autobiography, *The Confessions*, Augustine describes how he tried to meet Ambrose soon after his own appointment as teacher of rhetoric in Milan:

The multitude of people full of business whose infirmities he gave himself unto, prevented me from hearing and speaking with him. When he was not taken up with them, which was not very often, he either refreshed his body with necessary sustenance, or his mind with reading. But when he was reading, he drew his eyes along over the leaves, and his heart searched into the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. Often when we were with him, for no man was debarred from coming to see him, nor was it his fashion to have anybody who was coming to speak to him announced, we watched him reading silently, and never otherwise: and after we had long sat without speaking, for we dared not be so bold as to interrupt him when he was so intent on his study, we went out again.⁴

Ambrose played a decisive part in Augustine's conversion to Christianity.⁵ Augustine in his turn was to perform a great service to Ambrose's memory when, probably around AD 412, he persuaded Paulinus, a deacon of the church of Milan, to write Ambrose's biography,⁶ the work which was to provide the framework for all subsequent biographers. Ambrose impressed all

1 In fact Hilary of Poitiers (died 367/8) wrote the first Latin hymns: A. J. Mason, 'The First Christian Latin Poet', *JTS* 5 (1904), 413ff; A. S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns*, Cambridge, 1922, repr. Hildesheim, 1966, 1–15.

2 Jacques Fontaine, *Ambroise de Milan: hymnes*, Paris, 1992 (Text, French translation and full commentary). On the circumstances see also McLynn 1994, 200–01.

3 Augustine, *Conf.* 9.7. The conflict is discussed below pp. 124–35.

4 *Conf.* 6.2.

5 *Conf.* 5.13–14.

6 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 1; for a translation see Ramsey 1997, 195–218. The book also includes translations of hymns 1–4, documents concerning the altar of Victory, and some other works. On the date of the *Life* see below p. 27.

kinds of people. He certainly won a remarkable ascendancy over the emperors that came to Milan. His influence may not have been as instant and as consistently powerful as the older, and more hagiographical, historians have believed, but it was extraordinary nevertheless. In the whole of Roman history few if any individuals confronted emperors in the way Ambrose did repeatedly. But he certainly could not have risked confronting the emperor if he had not been certain that he would have very strong support among the citizens of Milan, and even among the emperor's troops. It could certainly be said of him that 'he could walk with kings – nor lose the common touch', and the letters of Book Ten illustrate the command of diplomatic and demagogic skills that enabled him to do that. Letters to bishops and members of the clergy in other books, impersonal though they may seem at first sight, display qualities that made him admired and beloved. As the son of a praetorian prefect Ambrose belonged to the senatorial aristocracy of the Empire. In this he was unusual among bishops of his time.¹ But Ambrose was very careful not to allude to this elevated background in his writings. What the style of his letters must have made abundantly clear to those of his colleagues who could appreciate it was that Ambrose belonged to what one might call 'the commonwealth of the lettered', the citizenship that united the rhetorically educated all over the Empire.² Ambrose certainly made enemies, but apart from a few individuals, mainly sectarian opponents, whom he openly attacks, the opponents do not figure in his writings. But they have left traces elsewhere. Jerome, for instance, scathingly, if misleadingly,³ compares his own Latinising of Greek writings with that of Ambrose: 'I have preferred to come forward openly as the translator of another man's book, than to deck myself out, as certain people do, like an ugly crow with someone else's plumes'.⁴ Rufinus, Jerome's one-time friend and later enemy, gives Ambrose much less space in his *Ecclesiastical History* than one would expect.⁵ Indeed when he comes to record the massacre of Thessalonica, he gives credit for persuading Theodosius to do penance not to Ambrose, but to 'the bishops of Italy'.⁶ An

1 See Salzmann 2002.

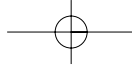
2 See Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, Madison, 1992, 35–70.

3 Jerome, too, regularly omitted to name his sources. But then naming sources was not required by ancient literary etiquette.

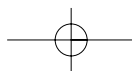
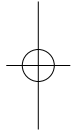
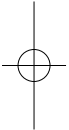
4 Jerome's translation of Didymus, *On the Holy Spirit*, pref. (PL 23.105); see J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome*, London, 1975, 143–44.

5 But Rufinus speaks up for Ambrose against Jerome in his *Apology against Jerome* 2.25.

6 *HE* 2.18.



active empire-builder, ever pushing forward the claims of Nicene orthodoxy and of the see of Milan, was bound to provoke hostility, particularly in Italy. While Ambrose was alive he made his impact as a campaigning bishop. When he was dead his reputation was preserved and enhanced by the commendation of Augustine, the *Life* of Paulinus, and his own writings.



II. THE LETTERS OF AMBROSE OF MILAN

1. Ambrose's collection of selected letters in ten books

Ambrose's letters have come down to us in a *Collection* of ten books, with two further series of together sixteen letters transmitted outside the *Collection*.¹ It looks as if Ambrose published the *Collection* in ten books himself, towards the end of his life, and after the death of the emperor Theodosius I in 395.² We cannot prove that he published them himself, but in a letter to a friend called Sabinus, he seems to tell us that he intended to publish at least some of his letters: 'these preliminary remarks I am sending you, and I will insert them, if you please in the book of our letters, and place them among their number, so that they may be promoted by the inclusion of your name'.³ The letters in the *Collection* had certainly already been published by the time Paulinus wrote his *Life of Ambrose*,⁴ probably in 412–13.⁵

If Ambrose did publish the collection of letters between 395 and 397, they constitute his last work. At that stage in life he preferred writing letters

1 Latin Text: Otto Faller, Michaela Zelzer *CSEL* 82.10.1–4. Book X and the *Epistulae extra collectionem* are in Vol. 3, edited by Michaela Zelzer, whose introductions to Vols 2 and 3 are fundamental to this discussion. Translations: Sister Mary Bayenka, *Saint Ambrose Letters*, Fathers of the Church 26, Washington, DC, 1954 (her text is pre-Zelzer); and (if it can be obtained) a very good Victorian version translated in the words of a blurb 'partly by the late S. F. Wood, M.A. Oriel', and revised by the Rev. B. H. Walford, *The Letters of Ambrose*, in A Library of the Fathers of the Catholic Church 45, Oxford, 1881. References are to Zelzer's edition, with the number of the old Benedictine/Maurist edition, which is the one printed in *PL*, cited in brackets.

2 The ten books appear to have been assembled at the same time, and not successively at different periods in Ambrose's life: already Book V includes a letter of 392, *Ep.* 25 (53).

3 *Ep.* 32 (48).

4 Paulinus could assume that the full text of a letter cited by him was available to readers (*V. Ambr.* 19 on *Ep.* 30 of Book VI).

5 According to ch. 51 he wrote it in Africa ('in this province where we are now living and writing'). According to ch. 31 a certain John, then a tribune, was 'now prefect'. John was praetorian prefect in 412–13, and again in 422 (*PLRE* 1, s.v. Iohannes 2). But it seems that Paulinus was in Africa from 411 to 418 (J.-L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine vandale et Byzantine*, Rome, 1973, 366). So 412–13 is the likely date.

to writing another book. To quote the letter to Sabinus once more: 'For the present we have chosen that which old men find more easy, the writing of letters in ordinary and familiar language including such passages from the Scriptures as happen to come to mind.'¹ Ambrose thought of the writing of letters as an activity suitable for an old man, which he felt himself to be.² As a letter-writer Ambrose was consciously following the example of Paul the Apostle, and approvingly quotes Paul's words: 'that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present';³ and when he says of Paul that he 'imprinted the image of his presence on his letters',⁴ he is clearly ascribing to Paul what he was trying to do himself. Ambrose not only wished the recipients of his letters to sense his personal presence, but also that through the letters his presence, like the presence of Paul, would be experienced long after he himself was dead and gone.

2. Letter-writing in Late Antiquity

The letter played a central and very practical role in ancient, as it does in modern, social life. A fundamental difference between the ancient and the modern letter was that the former was as a rule not carried by an impersonal agency like the post office, but by somebody closely associated with the writer of the letter, perhaps a friend, or a pupil, or a client or a servant; in any case somebody in a position to tell the addressee a lot about the health, thoughts and intentions of the writer. This meant that letters could be much shorter, and the rule was widely observed that a letter ought only to deal with a single theme, and it seems to have been good style to keep the treatment of even this concise. In fact to us, who are not familiar with their conventions, the first impression of ancient letters is that they are formal and empty, but an interesting message can often be decoded by careful reading.

The composition of letters, like the composition of speeches, was governed by strict conventions, observed even by individuals with social aspirations but without rhetorical schooling, who needed to have specimens of correctly written letters as examples to imitate. For letter-writing was not only an indispensable technique of communication, though of course it

¹ *Ep.* 32 (48), 7; see also *Ep.* 37 (47), 2.

² *Ep.* 28 (50), 16; 34 (45), 1.

³ 2 Cor. 10.11.

⁴ *Ep.* 37 (47), 6–7.

was that. But it was also an art form, a creative activity open to all educated people,¹ to whom it gave an opportunity to utilise and display their often painfully acquired literary culture and taste. From this point of view what was important about a letter was not its message, but its formal artistic quality; not the factual information the letter conveys, but what it tells the reader about its author's education and use of the literary language. So when a literary man, like Libanius or Symmachus, sat down to compose a letter, he thought not only about how best to accomplish the practical purpose of the letter (be it to help a friend, or to commend a student, or to petition an official or whatever), but also about how he could create a miniature work of art, which would be read and enjoyed for its own sake, and not only by the addressee.² Collections of letters were not necessarily published by the letter-writer himself. The collection of letters of Libanius we have seems to have been published after Libanius' death.³ We know that one of Paulinus of Nola's Gallic correspondents was collecting letters of Paulinus while their writer was still alive, though the collection that has come down to us seems to have been made after his death.⁴ When such letters were collected it was not because they contained interesting information about their writer, or the events he was involved in, but so that they might be appreciated as works of art, and at the same time to provide ordinary individuals with models for imitation in the many and various situations that called for the writing of a letter.

Many collections of letters have survived from Late Antiquity. The bureaucratic character of late Roman administration gave occasion to much writing of letters. Authors whose collected letters have come down to us

1 On the strict conventions and formulae governing the composition of letters see K. Thraede, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Briefftopik*, Zetemata 48, Munich, 1970; J. Sykutris, 'Epistolographie', *RE Suppl.* 5 (1931), 185–220.

2 See e.g. W. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, Oxford, 1972, 17–23, on the letters of Libanius. Cf. also n. 4 below on letters of Paulinus of Nola.

3 See p. 30 n. 7 below.

4 The letters of Paulinus of Nola were circulated by their recipients: D. E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1999, 16 n. 67, and especially S. Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola, Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen Christlichen Intellektuellen*, Hypomnemata 134, Göttingen, 2002, 408–14; individual collects letters in Paulinus' lifetime: *Ep.* 41.1; our collection published after Paulinus' death: Mratschek 2002, 409. C. Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, Oxford, 2000.

include the pagans Libanius¹ and Symmachus,² and the bishops John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola,³ Ruricius of Limoges,⁴ and of course Ambrose. Christian letters had a tradition of their own going back to the Epistles of Paul and others in the New Testament. For many years the exchange of letters between the scattered churches lacking an overall administration had performed the essential function of keeping the churches in touch with each other, and as far as at all possible united in ritual and belief. So Christian letters tend to contain a different range of information than secular letters. But the Christian letters of highly educated bishops like Ambrose and Augustine are composed in accordance with the conventions of secular letters,⁵ which these bishops had learnt at school just like their secular contemporaries.

Today when we read letters from the past we are more interested in the events and personalities than in language and style, but it was not from this point of view that ancient collections of letters were assembled. The collections should be thought of as 'anthologies' not as letters brought together to tell a story. The typical letter collection is not structured, either chronologically or, at least so it would seem in most cases, artistically⁶ except by chance.⁷ The single letter is the work of art, not the collection as a whole.

1 See Scott Bradbury, *Selected Letters of Libanius*, Translated Texts for Historians 41, Liverpool 2004.

2 See J. F. Matthews, 'The Letters of Symmachus', in J. W. Binns (ed.), *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, London, 1974, 58–99.

3 Translated by P. G. Walsh, *Letters of S. Paulinus of Nola*, 2 vols, Ancient Christian Writers 35–36, London, 1967; Mratschek 2002 is a comprehensive study.

4 R. W. Mathisen, *Ruricius of Limoges and Friends: A Collection of Letters from Visigothic Gaul*, Translated Texts for Historians 30, Liverpool, 2000.

5 The Bible was of course not recognised as a classic by pagan writers, far from it. Biblical citations are therefore only found in Christian letters.

6 It may be that in time scholars will discover more artistic or thematic criteria for the ordering and juxtaposition of letters within a collection of letters, as they have done in the composition of books of poets; cf. J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, Oxford, 1994, 1–17 on the publication of poems and letters of Sidonius.

7 When the edition follows the order of the author's book of copies, as in the case of the letters of Libanius, see O. Seeck, *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet*, Leipzig, 1906, repr. Hildesheim, 1967; and A. F. Norman, *Libanius Autobiography and Select Letters*, Vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, London, 1992, 35–41; and the last part of the collection of the letters of Symmachus: see O. Seeck's Introduction to his edition, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt*, MGH, AA 6.1, Berlin, 1883, repr. 1961.

3. Was Ambrose's *Collection* modelled on Pliny's?

We have, however, at least one letter collection that is quite obviously structured in a very sophisticated way to convey a picture of the author, his friends and the society in which they lived. This is the collection in ten books of the letters of Pliny. Pliny's letters have been selected to provide a comprehensive, if idealised, picture of Pliny's friends and their cultured and useful lives under the good emperor Trajan, with glimpses of less happy circumstances under the bad Domitian. Each letter is a work of art, and care has been taken to arrange the letters so as to produce effects of contrast and variety.¹ The *Collection* of Ambrose bears a definite resemblance to that of Pliny. It is not a random assembly of letters either. Its letters have obviously been selected out of a much larger number, and it is probable that they have also been arranged in a deliberate order.² The order is neither chronological nor by topic. The principle rather seems to be one of variety,³ with letters concerned with practical problems, or with personal relations interspersed among what are in fact mini-treatises, or sermons in the form of letters.⁴ Moreover, Ambrose's letters have been published in ten books like those of Pliny; and this, as the Austrian editor of the letters, Michaela Zelzer, has pointed out, cannot be a coincidence.⁵ It looks as if Ambrose modelled his collection on that of Pliny. The most conspicuous parallel is that in each collection the tenth book deals with public business: Ambrose's relations with emperors are the theme of his tenth book, just as the tenth book of Pliny's collection is concerned with Pliny's relation with the emperor Trajan. Of course there are

1 A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny. Historical and Social Commentary*, Oxford, 1966.

2 E.g. the intriguing juxtaposition of the two letters in Book Eight: 56 (5) and 57 (6) to Syagrius, bishop of Verona. See pp. 32–33 below.

3 M. Zelzer, 'Plinius Christianus; Ambrosius als Epistolograph', *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989), 203–08. In contrast, the arrangement of letters of Paulinus of Nola is roughly chronological (Mratschek 2002, 410), while nine of the ten books of letters of Symmachus were arranged by addressees. See G. A. Cecconi, *Commento storico al Libro II dell'epistolario di Q. Aurelio Simmaco*, Pisa, 2002, 29–33.

4 E.g. *Ep. ex.* 14

5 M. Zelzer, 'Plinius Christianus', *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989), 187–204; 'Zu Aufbau und Absicht des zehnten Briefbuches des Ambrosius', in *Latinität und Alte Kirche: Festschrift R. Hanslik*, Wiener Studien Beiheft 8, Vienna, 1977, 351–62. See also F. Trisoglio, 'Sant' Ambrogio conobbe Plinio il giovane?', *Rivista di Studi Classici* 20 (1972), 363–410. Though Ambrose imitated the form of Pliny's collection, allusions to individual letters of Pliny have been found in only one letter, *Ep.* 32.

differences too: Ambrose's Book Ten includes letters addressed to others than the emperor, and it does not include any letters written by the emperor himself.¹

4. The subject matter of Books 1–9

The first nine books of Ambrose's letters, like first nine books of the letters of Pliny, contain letters addressed to friends and colleagues. But Ambrose has not selected letters with a view to displaying the social distinction of his correspondents, or to illustrate their way of life. He has in fact only included a few letters whose evident purpose was to initiate or to maintain influential friendships with high-ranking individuals. Nor has he included very many examples of what one might call the staple of the typical collection, that is letters of recommendation of various kinds: for travellers in need of hospitality,² for litigants hoping for a favourable hearing, for men seeking employment or promotion.³ Over the years Ambrose must have written hundreds, perhaps thousands of letters to senators, high officials and to individuals of every kind in a position to exercise patronage. But if he kept duplicates of such letters, most of them eventually went into his wastepaper basket, or at any rate not into the *Collection*. This only contains enough of such letters to give the reader an idea of the range of activities and individuals that occupied Ambrose's time; and incidentally to show that Ambrose was capable of writing an elegant and appropriate letter for every occasion that called for one.⁴

Moreover, even the business letters are not necessarily precisely what they seem. For example the pairing of letters 56 (5) and 57 (6) suggests caution. *Ep.* 56 is addressed to Syagrius, bishop of Verona, and takes him severely to task for the way he has dealt with a consecrated virgin who had been accused of breaking her vow of chastity. Syagrius had subjected her to

1 The letter of Gratian (*CSEL*.82.3, cxvi) has not been transmitted with Ambrose's letters, but with Ambrose's tract *De spiritu sancto*. See below p. 270.

2 S. H. Mratschek, 'Multis enim notissima est sanctitas loci: Paulinus and the Gradual Rise of Nola as a Center of Christian Hospitality', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), 511–53.

3 E.g. Pliny, *Ep.* 1.16, 24; 2.13; Symmachus, *Ep.* 4.53, 60, 64, 67, 73; also numerous letters among those of Libanius translated by Bradbury 2004.

4 *Ep.* 5 (4) to Felix, bishop of Como, on the occasion of the anniversary of his consecration, and *Ep.* 43 (3) to the same, thanking for a gift of truffles are just two examples of Ambrose's skill as the writer of occasional letters.

physical examination, declared her guilty and imprisoned her. Ambrose heard an appeal and quashed the verdict. His letter, informing Syagrius of what he has done, seethes with moral indignation. *Ep.* 57 was written shortly after to the same bishop and retells the grisly Old Testament story of how the Israelites avenged the mass rape of a woman by the Benjamites.¹ Ambrose starts *Ep.* 57 by looking back at *Ep.* 56, but he does so in sorrow rather than in anger, and his tone is one of close friendship. As he gets into the story, the tone changes. He is now inviting Syagrius to enjoy the horror story, expertly told in accordance with the rules of storytelling which both have learnt at school. What has happened to the indignation of *Ep.* 56? What are we to make of the abrupt change of mood? Is the explanation that Ambrose is now trying to restore his relations with Syagrius, which he had badly damaged, to say the least, by intervening in a court case which was of no concern to the bishop of Milan? Or could it be that the stern forensic note of *Ep.* 56 is just as much a display of rhetorical skill as the shocking narrative (*ekphrasis* / *descriptio*) of *Ep.* 57? We have a similar case in *Ep.* 62 (19). Ambrose has been asked for guidance by the newly consecrated bishop of Trent, Vigilius. Ambrose's advice is that he should not allow members of his community to marry outside their faith and he justifies his advice by telling the story of Samson, which certainly brings out the danger of marrying someone of a foreign religion. But Ambrose recounts the story at length in the expanded version of Josephus,² which may well have been unknown to Vigilius, and he tells it with relish. He may have been quite serious about the moral lesson, but he certainly also wants to entertain the new bishop by telling him a new version of the old story, and by telling it well.

Ambrose's *Collection* includes specimens of the ordinary, everyday, business correspondence of a bishop, but these amount to only a small proportion of the whole. In this respect Ambrose's *Collection* is much less representative than, say, the collected letters of Basil or of Augustine. The majority of Ambrose's letters are concerned with questions of theology, the proper behaviour of clergy, and above all biblical exegesis. The addressees, whether clerics or laymen, are above all persons interested in understanding the Bible,³ people who had asked Ambrose to explain a passage that was puzzling, or

1 Judges 19–21 and Josephus, *Ant.* 5.8 (136–74).

2 Josephus, *Ant.* 5.11–12 (306–17).

3 Ambrose's allegorical interpretation of the Bible in Sunday sermons helped Augustine's conversion, *Conf.* 6.3–4.

who would at any rate be grateful rather than bored if Ambrose sent them a lengthy piece of exegesis, often something which he had come across in his reading of a Greek author, notably in Philo or Origen.¹ The addressees are not necessarily people of importance. Irenaeus who received twelve letters of biblical exegesis, more than anybody else, was a layman of whom nothing is otherwise known, while Honoratianus, who received nine, appears to have been simply a cleric who had been ordained by Ambrose. Zelzer has pointed out that many of the 'letters' are probably not real letters at all, but mini-treatises, or sermons in letter form.² At any rate, it is likely that when he wrote such pieces Ambrose did not have in mind any particular correspondent, and it would be reasonable to suppose that some of the exegetical letters were in fact sent to more than one addressee.³ The passages chosen for exegesis have usually not been selected because they have an obvious bearing on central teachings of doctrine or morals, but rather because their interpretation offers some difficulty, or because the most obvious interpretation seems to be inconsistent with divine inspiration. One might perhaps say that Ambrose and his circle were interested in the Bible, and in the figurative meanings that could be drawn out of it, in the same way as friends of the pagan senator Praetextatus were interested in arcane meanings of Virgil, the subject matter, if we are to believe Macrobius, of their table talk during the Saturnalia. McLynn has suggested that among the functions of the letters was that of accrediting the men who received them as followers of Ambrose,⁴ and this is right in as much as this biblical exegesis is something of a social game. But the allegorical interpretations Ambrose employed in expounding the Bible are not simply the stylised and idiosyncratic discourse of a would-be exclusive circle. They also provide welcome instruction as to how it is possible to avoid the difficulties caused by a literal reading of the Bible. Certainly Augustine felt that Ambrose's interpretations had removed what had seemed insuperable obstacles to the acceptance of Christian belief: 'the Catholic faith ... I now

1 See M. Zelzer's introductory comments in *CSEL* 82.2.xx-xxxv; H. Savon, *Saint Ambroise devant l'exégèse de Philon le Juif*, Paris, 1977.

2 Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.2.xxxvii.

3 *Ep.* 65 addressed to Clementianus refers to *Ep.* 64 as 'my previous letter', even though in the *Collection* it is addressed to Irenaeus. The answer must surely be that *Ep.* 64 had been sent to Clementianus as well as to Irenaeus, and probably to yet others as well. Similarly *Ep.* 68 (to Irenaeus) seems to be a continuation of *Ep.* 50 (to Studius). So it would seem that Irenaeus had also received a copy of *Ep.* 50, cf. Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.2.xxxii-iv.

4 McLynn 1994, 282.

concluded with myself, might well be maintained without absurdity ... after I had heard one or two hard places of the Old Testament resolved ... which when I understood literally, I was slain.¹

5. The problem of Ambrose's text of the Bible

The reader of Ambrose's translated letters will soon notice that biblical verses as cited by him frequently differ from the version in which they are generally known in English, for instance from the Authorised Version or the New Revised Version.² This is not really surprising in view of the amount of scholarly work that has gone into the creation of the modern texts. But Ambrose's text of the Bible also shows many divergences from the Vulgate, the traditional Latin translation of the Bible, which was only coming into existence in the 380s, with Jerome's revision of the older Latin texts of the Gospels completed by 384, and his subsequent revision of the Psalms, prophets and the historical books of the Old Testament from the Hebrew only by 405/6.³ The standard view is that Ambrose's citations reflect a Latin text which was widespread in northern Italy at the time.⁴ It is not clear to what extent, if at all, Ambrose took notice of Jerome's revisions as they became known to him. It does look as if Ambrose's citations sometimes reflect the Greek Septuagint rather than the old Latin versions. It would be interesting to examine how important it was for Ambrose to cite the correct wording of the biblical text, and whether he might be satisfied with a roughly correct citation from memory, or even felt entitled to make changes to the wording in order to make a particular passage more relevant to his present exegetical purpose.

6. The subject matter of Book Ten

As has been mentioned earlier, the subject matter of Book Ten is different from that of the other books. In Book Ten Ambrose has assembled letters and other documents related to his dealings with the emperors Gratian,

1 *Conf.* V.14, tr. W. Watts in Loeb Classical Library.

2 We have sometimes but by no means always indicated divergences from the New Revised Version,

3 J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome*, London, 1975, 86–89, 159–67; H. F. D. Sparks, 'Jerome as a Biblical Scholar', in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, Cambridge, 1970, 510–41.

4 H. J. Frede, 'Probleme des ambrosianischen Bibeltextes', in *Ambrosius Episcopus*, ed. G. Lazzati, Milan, 1976, Vol. 1. 365–92.

Valentinian II and Theodosius I, just as the tenth book of Pliny's letters contains his correspondence with the emperor Trajan.¹ That the *Collection* is made up of nine books of 'religious' letters and only one of 'political' letters is surely significant. It suggests that, for Ambrose, theology and pastoral work were much more important than one might gather from McLynn's brilliant biography, with its focus on Ambrose the politician.

Book Ten is not strictly speaking a collection of letters at all, but a series of dossiers of letters and other documents related to a small number of incidents, all of which illustrate sensational, not to say heroic, episodes in Ambrose's life, and at the same time exemplify principles that he thought should govern the relations of Church and state.

7. The documents making up Book Ten

Book Ten is made up as follows. It starts with two self-contained documents, *Ep.* 70 (56) of AD 392 addressed to Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, on the subject of the schism at Antioch and *Ep.* 71 (56a) of AD 393 to the bishops of Macedonia, concerning Bishop Bonosus, who was alleged to teach that the Virgin Mary had given birth to sons after Jesus. There are no reasons to believe that these letters were not composed and sent to the addressees in the circumstances implied by their subject matter.

Next we have a group of three documents: *Ep.* 72 (17) of AD 384 addressed to the emperor Valentinian II; *Ep.* 72 a (17a), which is not by Ambrose at all, but by Symmachus, the famous *Third Relatio*, pleading for the retention of the altar of Victory; and *Ep.* 73 (18), Ambrose's formal reply to Symmachus. The three documents constitute a single dossier documenting Ambrose's success in preventing the emperor from restoring the altar of Victory to the senate chamber. Of the three documents only *Ep.* 72 is a real letter. See below p. 000.

The next letter, *Ep.* 74 (40) of AD 388, is addressed to the emperor Theodosius on the subject of the destroyed synagogue at Callinicum. The letter urges the emperor not to punish monks and others who had destroyed a synagogue in distant Mesopotamia. This is presumably a real letter. A second

1 According to Sherwin White 1966, 52–56, Pliny published the first nine books in separate batches himself. The tenth book was published after his death, but a collection including all ten books can be traced back to a manuscript of the sixth century (Sherwin White 1966, 83). It is likely that the edition in ten books is older than that, and therefore old enough to have been known by Ambrose.

only slightly different version of *Ep.* 74 has been transmitted as 1a (40) *extra collectionem*, where it is followed by a letter to Ambrose's sister giving a much amplified version of the same argument, but this time in the shape of a sermon delivered in the presence of Theodosius, *Ep. ex.* 1 (41). This concludes with a dramatic description of how Ambrose confronted the emperor at the climax of mass. I suspect that Ambrose originally wrote the letter to his sister with the intention of publishing it together with that to the emperor in the *Collection*,¹ but that for some reason he changed his mind.

There follows another dossier. *Ep.* 75 (21) was addressed to the emperor Valentinian II in January or early February 386 – or so we argue. *Ep.* 75a (21a), also known as *Contra Auxentium*, is the text of a sermon, which, if its heading is to be believed, was presented to the emperor Valentinian II, though its aggressive tone makes this most unlikely. Its most probable date is January 386.² *Ep.* 76 (20) was sent to Ambrose's sister around Easter 386. Of these documents *Ep.* 75 is a real letter. *Ep.* 76, though addressed to his sister, includes the text of a sermon. It was surely composed from the first with a view to reaching a much wider public, that is, it is a pamphlet rather than a personal communication. *Ep.* 75a is simply a sermon and in no sense a letter. Together the three documents record the story of Ambrose's conflict with the court and his resistance to repeated demands that he should hand over a church for a service, or services, of the *Homoian* sect, which would be attended by the emperor.

The next document in the *Collection* is the oration, *On the death of Theodosius*, of February AD 395.³ Zelzer has inserted only the title on p. 126 of her edition of Book Ten, as the full text is to be found in *CSEL* 73.369–401. Ambrose delivered this speech at Milan, when the body of the dead emperor was about to be sent for burial to Constantinople. Ambrose praises Theodosius as the ideal emperor, and as an example to all of how a Christian emperor should behave, especially in his dealings with the Church.

The book ends with *Ep.* 77 (22), of spring or early summer 386, a letter to his sister, incorporating the text of a sermon, and describing the finding of the remains of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius. This discovery is represented as a divine sign. In the context of the *Collection* it must be read as an

1 Like *Ep.* 76

2 Otherwise McLynn 1994, 196–208 who argues for some time after Holy Week 386.

3 The *CSEL* text was used for the translation. *PL* 16.1417–44 has the old Benedictine text. See also Sister Mary D. Mannix, *Sancti Ambrosii oratio de obitu Theodosii*, Text, Translation and Commentary, Washington, DC, 1925.

indication of divine approval of Ambrose and especially of the stands Ambrose had taken in the incidents documented in Book Ten. The letter makes a powerful conclusion to the *Collection*.

8. The letters transmitted outside the *Collection*

Not all surviving letters of Ambrose have been transmitted within the *Collection*. Two series, of respectively 12 and 5 letters, have been transmitted separately, *extra collectionem*.¹ The documents of the first group are documents of the same kind as the letters of Book Ten of the *Collection*. All but one are addressed to an emperor. The exception, *Ep. ex. 1*, as has been mentioned earlier, is addressed to Ambrose's sister. It is, however, concerned with Ambrose's dispute with the emperor Theodosius over the burning of the synagogue of Callinicum. It therefore supplements *Ep. 74* in the *Collection*. *Ep. ex. 2* and 3 are addressed to Theodosius after his defeat of Eugenius. *Epp. ex. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9* form a dossier of letters to Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius reporting on the Council of Aquileia of 381, a key episode in Ambrose's episcopate. Though Ambrose had excluded these letters from the *Collection* he evidently kept them where Paulinus, looking for material for his *Life* after Ambrose's death,² could easily find and use them. The *Life* has allusions to *Epp. ex. 1, 2, 3* and 10. It may well be that Ambrose had intended that they should be used in this way. Why Ambrose omitted these letters from his own *Collection* is an interesting question.³

The second group of letters *extra collectionem* is more miscellaneous, though they are not ordinary letters either. *Ep. 11* is the famous letter to Theodosius protesting over the massacre at Thessalonica. It could well have been part of the *Collection*. Ambrose presumably had a reason for excluding it, and preferred the version of that incident which he gave in the *De obitu Theodosii*. *Ep. ex. 12* is addressed to the emperor Gratian. Though it is a document which must be discussed by anyone trying to reconstruct the obscure early part of Ambrose's episcopate, it does not raise or illustrate any issue of lasting significance. *Ep. ex. 13* is a sermon-like treatise on the date of Easter, which informs north Italian bishops of the Alexandrian views on the proper date of Easter, when, as was about to happen in 387, the fourteenth moon in

1 On transmission of first group see Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.xcvii-ci, of second group Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.cxxix-cxxx.

2 See p. 44 n. 3 below.

3 Any answers will necessarily be speculative.

spring falls on a Sunday. The letter is therefore comparable to the many letters which bring Greek allegorical interpretation of the Bible to the notice of the Latin-speaking West. *Ep. ex.* 14 is a very long sermon in the form of a letter addressed to the church of Vercelli, where internecine disputes have held up the election of a successor to the deceased bishop. *Ep. Sir.* and *Ep. ex.* 15 are respectively a letter of Pope Siricius and a reply to it written by Ambrose in the name of a synod of north Italian bishops, declaring their adhesion to the pope's excommunication of Jovinianus, a monk who had been preaching and writing against the superiority of the ascetic life and especially of virginity over the married state. This was something Ambrose felt strongly about. *Ep. ex.* 14 also has a long section upholding the ascetic life, evidently directed against Jovinianus. One would like to know when the small second group of letters *extra collectionem* was assembled, and for what purpose. Paulinus, Ambrose's biographer does not seem to have known them, or at least he does not allude to any of them in the *Life*.¹

It is evident that the episodes highlighted in the *Collection*, that is, the issues on which Ambrose was proud to have made a stand, were more often than not far from what would today be considered politically correct. The message of Book Ten is, with a little simplification, that in the field of religion a Christian emperor must not make concessions of any kind to the religious requirements of his pagan, sectarian Christian, or Jewish subjects. In the letters about the synagogue at Callinicum Ambrose goes as far as to insist that acts of criminal damage for which the perpetrators would normally be punished, or at least compelled to pay compensation, are to be ignored if the damage was inflicted in the name of orthodox Christianity on Jews or heretics. The letter describing what to modern minds is the most admirable of Ambrose's acts of confrontation of the secular power, his compelling the emperor Theodosius to do penance for the massacre of 7000 civilians in the hippodrome of Thessalonica, has been transmitted only *extra collectionem*, and was not included in Book Ten.² Theodosius' penance for the massacre at Thessalonica is, however, emphasised in the sermon *On the death of Theodosius*, which is in the *Collection*. But whatever we think of the causes Ambrose took up, nobody can question that he always displayed exemplary courage, both moral and physical.

1 If Paulinus had known these letters, one would have expected him to allude to at least *Ep. ex.* 11 in the context of his narrative of the Thessalonica episode.

2 Perhaps because it was a confidential letter (cf. *Ep. ex.* 11.50). Its extremely diplomatic formulation does suggest that it is a real letter, which was actually sent to the emperor.

9. Were any of the letters composed specifically in order to become part of the *Collection*?

Book Ten is certainly not simply a collection of miscellaneous letters which Ambrose happened to find in his files. A number of the documents read as if they had from the first been composed for publication. They appear to be addressed not so much to their respective addressees as to the general public, and to posterity. This is obviously so in the case of the oration in praise of the late emperor Theodosius which Ambrose gave at Milan forty days after the emperor's death. It is also true of the second and longer letter to the emperor Valentinian II on the altar of Victory.¹ This so-called letter was not in fact the document submitted to the consistory and involved in the decisive act of persuasion. It is a very carefully written oration, presenting a point-by-point refutation of the submission of Symmachus. But it was composed only after the pagan petition had already been rejected. Ambrose can be seen to have had two aims in writing it: first, to expound once and for all the Christian case for the abandonment of the ancient and time-honoured public religion of the Roman people; and secondly, to display his own skill as an orator, and to demonstrate that in oratory he was at least the equal of Symmachus, who was the most distinguished orator of the time.² Then there are the three letters Ambrose addressed to his sister. Now it has been known for brothers and sisters to be good friends, and for a brother to keep his sister fully informed of all interesting things that happen to him. But the letters of Ambrose to his sister are not like that. Each of them is a careful composition, comprising both a narrative of exciting events, and a sermon which Ambrose had held while the events were happening. The letters give his sister a dramatic account of how Ambrose stood up for what he thought was right, and a theological justification, backed up by numerous citations from the Bible, of the stand he had taken. They were surely from the very beginning intended for the widest possible public. In fact the letters publicise Ambrose's view of the affairs, and present them as he wanted the wider issues at stake, as well as his own part in the events, to be seen and judged.

Perhaps the clearest example of a letter that is not what it seems is *Ep.* 30 (24) in Book Six. The letter purports to be Ambrose's report to the

¹ *Ep.* 72.1

² Hence there are an unusually large number of allusions to Virgil in Ambrose's letter. See below pp. 86–87.

emperor Valentinian II on his second embassy to the usurper Maximus at Trier, which has been variously dated by different scholars in 384/5 or in 386.¹ Taken at face value the letter would be an extremely important source for the state of relations between Valentinian II and Maximus at a critical time. In fact most of the letter is taken up by a discussion between Ambrose and the usurper Maximus in which Ambrose defends his own conduct during a previous embassy, and is remarkably outspoken, even impudent, towards the usurper. This conversation is most unlikely to have taken place, or if it did, it will have been very different from the way it is represented in the letter. Ambrose had been sent to Trier to negotiate with Maximus, not to provoke him, and he was far too skilful a politician to let a delicate mission turn into a slanging match. What Valentinian required from his ambassador would have surely been a report of how far his mission had been successful, not an account of how fearlessly outspoken he had been. In short, we can be certain that if Ambrose wrote a report of his second embassy, this letter is not it. We can ask why Ambrose thought it worthwhile to write and publish this so-called 'letter'. Whatever the answer, we can be sure that it was not to inform Valentinian of what had been achieved, or not achieved, by the embassy.²

It is of course possible that Ambrose wrote a report and radically revised it for publication. In fact it is possible that it was Ambrose's normal practice to revise letters for publication, but it is usually impossible to prove whether he has done this or not. Letter 74 however, has been transmitted in two only slightly different versions, both as *Ep.* 74 within the *Collection*, and as letter *Ep. ex.* 1a outside it. It is reasonably certain that the edited version is the one in the *Collection*.³ This suggests that the letter underwent some editing for the *Collection*, but also that the editing was not extensive.⁴ Of course one letter does not provide a sound basis for generalisation,⁵ but radical revision in some cases cannot be totally ruled out. Revision apart, it does look as if 'real letters' in the *Collection* have been supplemented by letters written largely or

1 See below p. 349.

2 M. Dörner, 'Ambrosius in Trier', *Historia* 50 (2001), 217–44, argues that the terms of the letter do make sense in the circumstances of Ambrose's embassy. We are not convinced. See below pp. 350–55.

3 See p. 95 n. 2 below.

4 Cf. Sherwin White's thoughts (1966, 11–16) on the editing that Pliny's letters had undergone.

5 It is likely, but not certain, that the original version of the funeral sermon *De obitu Theodosii* had the Helena excursus added to it.

entirely for the sake of wide publicity, whose status is not very different from the political orations of Libanius, which are in fact pamphlets to be sent to such of the sophist's friends as he thought appropriate. That some of Ambrose's 'letters' have in all probability been written for publicity, rather than as instruments of negotiation or diplomacy, is something the historian must bear in mind if he or she wants to reconstruct Ambrose's conflicts with the court, or indeed the functioning of late Roman government.

10. The originality of the *Collection*

If Ambrose's *Collection* is not simply a collection of letters, what is it? It is something new. Taking up the classical genre of the collection of literary letters, particularly in the sophisticated form given it by Pliny, Ambrose has turned it into something like a political and theological testament. Since Ambrose was a gifted orator and a very original poet it is not altogether surprising that he should create a new genre for his own use. His letters are an aspect of the recasting of the Roman literary tradition in the service of Christianity.¹

Ambrose's *Collection* of letters is a literary innovation. In this it is like *The Confessions* of Augustine, which in many ways is the earliest autobiography in the modern sense of the word. Yet Ambrose's *Collection* is not an autobiography: even in Book Ten, the book which comes closest to autobiography, the letters are not in chronological order. Furthermore Ambrose was not concerned to document the whole of his life, or even his episcopate. For us this is unfortunate. Ambrose has not provided us with information we would very much like to have, either about his early life, or about his early years as bishop.² Ambrose was not concerned to explore his own intellectual and spiritual development, or to show how he had found God, or to demonstrate how God had guided him over the course of his life. Like Pliny, he wanted to portray himself through his relations with friends and colleagues, but his focus is totally on his work as a bishop and pastor, and above all as a guide to the deeper meanings of the biblical text. Then in Book Ten, his aim is to document a limited number of remarkable episodes in which he had

1 In the same spirit Ambrose recast Cicero's *de officiis* into a treatise on Christian duties. See K. Zelzer, 'Zur Beurteilung der Cicero-Imitatio bei Ambrosius *de officiis*', *Wiener Studien* 90 (1977), 168–91; I. J. Davidson, *Ambrose: De officiis*, Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford, 2002.

2 See Williams 1995, esp. 28–40.

been actively involved, and to explain the principles which had governed his conduct in them. Nevertheless this dossier of documents proved to be of first-rate historical importance, for it amounts to the earliest statement of the Church's claims on the state.

11. The influence of the letters of Ambrose.

What was the impact of Ambrose's self-presentation? In perhaps 403, the Christian poet Prudentius wrote the second book of his *Contra Symmachum*, in which he refuted the third *Relatio* of Symmachus, as Ambrose had done twenty years earlier in *Ep.* 73. He therefore covered ground that had already been covered by Ambrose, and appears to have taken two important ideas from him. Prudentius has adopted the argument that at the root of controversy between the old and the new religion was a conflict between ancestral custom (*mos maiorum*) and human progress,¹ and like Ambrose he insists that it was Roman *virtus*, not pagan piety, that had enabled the Romans to win their empire.² But seen as a whole, Prudentius' poem, far from being nothing more than a versification of Ambrose's letter, is an independent and original creation, which does not include as much as a single allusion to the bishop of Milan.³ One would like to know why.⁴

Perhaps ten years after Ambrose's death, the format of his *Collection* was adopted by the younger Symmachus, the son of Ambrose's pagan antagonist, when he came to make a collection of his father's letters. For he assembled them in ten books, the last of which contains letters to emperors and other public business; and like the letters of Ambrose these letters are not arranged in chronological order.⁵

1 *Contra Symmachum* II.277–302, cf. *Ep.* 73.23–29.

2 *Contra Symmachum* II.551–550, cf. *Ep.* 73.7.

3 W. Evepoel, 'Prudence et la conversion des aristocrates romains', *Augustinianum* 30 (1990), 31–43.

4 Ancient authors did not as a rule name their sources. Besides, Prudentius' poem is not a history of the controversy over the altar of Victory, but a demonstration in traditional epic form, that Christianity is the right and proper religion for the Romans, a kind of Christian *Aeneid*. See J. Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien*, Paris, 1981, 211–27.

5 According to O. Seeck's edition, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt*, Berlin, 1883, repr. 1961, p. xxiii, n. 42, one manuscript introduces book ten: 'book ten of the letters of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus containing personal (*familiares*) letters to emperors, decisions of the senate, and minor writings, edited after his (the elder Symmachus') death by Quintus Flavius Memmius Symmachus of clarissimate rank'. Most of Symmachus' tenth book has been lost, but the *Relationes* have survived as a separate collection.

When, probably in 412–13, St Augustine persuaded Paulinus, deacon, defensor and procurator of the church of Milan,¹ to write a life of Ambrose,² Paulinus was already able to make use of the *Collection* of Ambrose's letters as well as of some letters not included in the *Collection*.³ He described the great episodes of Ambrose's career, but above all he presented him as a saint capable of working miracles.⁴ At this time Ambrose's reputation surely did not depend on literature. Nobody who had met him could have forgotten the experience, though the memory cannot in every case have been a pleasant one.

Subsequently Ambrose's reputation depended on his writings, on his theological writings as much as, and even more than, on his letters.⁵ It is certainly the case that if we did not have the letters, and Paulinus' *Life* which is partly based on them, our picture of Ambrose would be significantly different. Ambrose does figure in the ecclesiastical historians Rufinus (c. 400), Socrates (c. 440), Sozomen (c. 446) and Theodoret (c. 450). But he is much less prominent than one would expect after reading the letters. None of the ecclesiastical historians mentions Ambrose's part in the affair of the altar of Victory, or indeed the affair itself; nor do they mention Ambrose's intervention on behalf of the monks who had destroyed the synagogue at Callinicum. Moreover they represent the conflict of 386 not as an issue of principle over the surrender of a church for use by Arians, but as an attempt by the Arian empress Justina to have Ambrose banished.⁶ Only Sozomen⁷ and Theodoret⁸ describe how Ambrose rebuked Theodosius after the massacre of Thessalonica. Indeed Theodoret dramatises this episode further in order to hammer home Ambrose's

1 According to 'Praedestinatus', *PL* 53.617D

2 One motive could have been that Pelagius, whom Augustine was opposing, had cited Ambrose in support of his doctrine that man can live without sin. See Williams 1995, 106–07.

3 See *V. Ambr.* 23–24, 27, 31.

4 L. Cracco-Ruggini, 'Prêtre et fonctionnaire, le modèle ambrosien', *Antiquité Tardive* 7 (1999), 175–86.

5 Ambrose's treatise *On the Faith* (*De fide*) is cited repeatedly by Theodoret in his *Dialogues* (*Eranistes*) of c. 444.

6 Rufinus, *HE* II.15–16; Socrates, *HE* V.11; Sozomen, *HE* VII.13; Theodoret, *HE* V.13

7 Sozomen, *HE* VII.25.

8 Theodoret, *HE* V.17.

point that it is the duty of a bishop to discipline an emperor who has sinned, and that a pious emperor must submit to the bishop's discipline.¹

The history of the influence of Ambrose has not yet been written.² We know that when Pope Hildebrand, Gregory VII, excommunicated the German emperor Henry IV in 1076, he justified this daring act by citing as a precedent what Ambrose had done to Theodosius after the massacre at Thessalonica.³ Ambrose was regularly cited in debates about the relations of Church and state in Elizabethan England.⁴ But I suspect that it is only in modern times, when people have become less interested in theology and miracles, that the letters have really come into their own.

For modern historians, from Gibbon to McLynn, Ambrose is the man who could speak his mind to the most powerful men in the world, and not only get away with it, but even get his way. So, to quote Gibbon, 'posterity has applauded the virtuous firmness of the archbishop, and the example of Theodosius may prove the beneficial influence of those principles which could force a monarch, exalted above the apprehension of human punishment, to respect the law and ministers of an invisible judge'.⁵ More recently the Catholic Encyclopedia sums up what Ambrose strove and fought for: 'He enunciated the principle that the Church is supreme in its own domain, and is the guardian of morality. Even emperors despite their lofty dignity and absolutism are subject to the moral laws as defined by the Church.'⁶ This is the Ambrose that interests and fascinates historians, even if they do not necessarily approve of him. Gibbon had very strong reservations: 'The cause of humanity and that of persecution have been asserted by the same Ambrose with equal energy and equal success'. Ambrose would not have understood the implied criticism, which is based on

1 Thodoret's drama is his own composition and not derived from Ambrose's letter. The idea that Ambrose personally prevented Theodosius from entering the church comes from Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 24. Theodoret had his own reasons for distrusting emperors: see H. Leppin, *Von Constantin dem grossen zu Theodosius II, das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret*, Göttingen, 1996; T. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: the Bishop and the Holy Man*, Ann Arbor, MI, 2000.

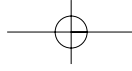
2 But see M. Zelzer, 'Das ambrosianische Corpus *De virginitate* und seine Rezeption im Mittelalter', *Studia Patristica* 38 (2001), 510–23.

3 Gregory VII, *Ep.* 4.2; 8.21.

4 P. Collinson, '"If Constantine, then also Theodosius": St Ambrose and the Integrity of the Elizabethan *Ecclesia Anglicana*', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 30 (1979), 205–29.

5 *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. 27.

6 Vol. I. 375



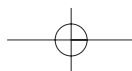
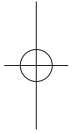
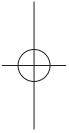
Ambrose's own letters. For Gibbon's Ambrose is precisely the Ambrose of Book Ten of the letters. He is the man who wrote to an emperor: 'It is my way to show respect to emperors but not to yield to them',¹ and 'in matters of Faith it is usual for bishops to pass judgement on emperors not emperors on bishops'.² In other words, the modern view of Ambrose, whether of theologian or historian, is based precisely on Ambrose's own publicity. Not a few politicians would be happy if they could control posterity's view of themselves as successfully as Ambrose did.

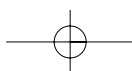
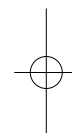
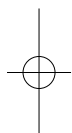
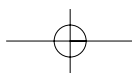
¹ *Ep.* 76(21a).2.

² *Ep.* 75(21).4.



AMBROSE OF MILAN
***LETTERS*, BOOK TEN**





LETTERS ON MATTERS ARISING FROM THE COUNCIL OF CAPUA

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULAE* 70 AND 71

Theodosius remained in Italy for two years after the defeat and death of Magnus Maximus at Aquileia in August 388. During this time, his residence was mainly in Milan, though from mid-June to the start of September 389 he was in Rome.¹ On the whole Ambrose had little influence on Theodosius' policy for the eastern Church.² Still, it may have been at the urging of Ambrose that before his return to the east in late June or July 391,³ Theodosius called what was intended to be an ecumenical council at Rome, with the main objective of finally settling the long-standing schism at Antioch, where the episcopal throne was contested by two people and their respective supporters.⁴

The council met over the winter of 391–2, after the emperor's departure from Italy. It met at Capua rather than Rome – none of our sources explains this transfer.⁵ As letter 70 indicates, only one of the rival claimants to the see of Antioch, Evagrius, appeared before it. The other, Flavian, successfully pleaded to Theodosius his advanced age and reluctance to travel in the winter.⁶ Nor did any eastern bishops attend and therefore, even though, as indicated in *Ep.* 70.3, it does seem to have been attended by many bishops from all over the west, it cannot be considered an ecumenical council: it was called instead a 'full assembly'.⁷

1 See McLynn 1994, 310–13.

2 It has been argued that he did not even have the influence traditionally attributed to him over Theodosius' religious policy in the West: see McLynn 1994, 330–33, reviewing the famous anti-pagan legislation of 24 February 391.

3 *CTh* 16.10.11 was issued from Aquileia on 16 June 391, perhaps when Theodosius was on his way to Constantinople by land.

4 See the Introduction to *Ep.* 70, and the letter itself.

5 See Palanque 1933, 541; Ch. Pietri, *Roma christiana. Recherches sur l'église de Rome (311–440)*, 2 vols, Paris 1976, 1077–82.

6 Theodoret, *HE* 5.23. This helps to date the council.

7 *Plenarium*. See K. J. Hefele and H. Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, 11 vols, Paris 1907–52, Vol. 8, 81 n.1.

Letters 70 and 71 are concerned with the two main problems discussed by the council: how to end the divisions in the Church arising out of the disputed succession to the see of Antioch; and what to do about Bonosus, bishop of either Naissus or Sardica, who taught that Mary did not remain a virgin but gave birth to further sons after the birth of Christ.

Both letters are written in the plural 'we', with Ambrose referred to by name and in the third person in *Ep.* 71. The current consensus of scholarly opinion is nevertheless that both were written by Ambrose.¹ Although letter 71 has been ascribed to Pope Siricius,² the fact that it is found at the start of Book Ten of Ambrose's letters must be taken as a strong indicator that he is the author of both; for, there is no doubt that the letters of the *Collection* were carefully selected and revised by Ambrose himself, and he is unlikely to have included in his collection letters that had been written by somebody else.³ That letter 71 should have been attributed to Siricius is understandable,⁴ given that in 393 Siricius requested Ambrose to deal with the problem of the Jovinianus, with whom Bonosus was associated.⁵

After the 'Peace of the Church' (313), but with gathering force from the reign of Damasus (366–85),⁶ the see of Rome had been seeking to extend its authority not just in the west, but throughout the empire. So one might have expected Siricius to preside over the Council of Capua. The fact Siricius did not attend himself but instead sent legates might be taken to indicate that he wished to avoid a meeting called at the instigation of Ambrose, and likely to be dominated by him. But this does not follow. At this time the West, unlike the East, did not have a fully fledged diocesan organisation, except in Italia Suburbicaria (central and southern Italy). Furthermore it was unusual at this

1 Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.10.iii, pp. xxx–xxxi summarises the debate; see also Y.-M. Duval, 'L'originalité du "de virginibus" dans le mouvement ascétique occidentale', in Y.-M. Duval (ed.), *Ambroise de Milan XVI Centenaire*, Paris 1974, 9–66, esp. 58–59. The last sentence of *Ep.* 71.2 shows that the letter was written by a single bishop, and not by the synod. That the letter refers to and repeats the advice Ambrose had given to Bonosus increases the probability that this letter was written by Ambrose.

2 For instance by Campenhausen 1929, 120 n. 6, 121 n. 4.

3 *Ep.* 72a (= *relatio* III of Symmachus) is the exception, but it is there for the precise reason that *Ep.* 73 is a reply to it.

4 See Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.10.iii, p. xxx.

5 See below, p. 56, the introduction to *Ep.* 71, for the teachings of Bonosus; and see the introductions and translations of *Ep. ex. 14* and the letter of Siricius on Jovinianus.

6 See Pietri 1976, 729–881. See the introduction to *Ep. ex. 7*, p. 244 below.

time for the bishop of Rome to leave the city to preside over a council held anywhere else.

So we cannot necessarily assume that Siricius' absence from Capua arose from a reluctance to be overshadowed by Ambrose. It does seem clear, however, that Ambrose did seek to achieve a regional supremacy perhaps even from the start of his episcopate; and while emperors were resident in Milan and he had some sort of access to the process of imperial decision-making, Ambrose did in fact achieve an authority that was more than regional.¹ These two letters show him exercising such authority, for both were written in response to letters seeking his advice as though he had the authority to decide.

It is possible that Ambrose placed these two letters at the start of Book Ten precisely to emphasise that pre-eminence, particularly as *Ep.* 70 shows him as acting on a problem that had troubled the Church for seventy years. Ambrose is also pointing out of the need to follow correct ecclesiastical procedures. Above all he emphasises that the Church's problems should be dealt with by the Church itself, acting through agencies set up with agreed authority to settle an issue, and without recourse to imperial intervention: letter 70 indicates that the council had authorised Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria and his colleagues in Egypt to take action; letter 71 indicates that similar authority had been given to the bishops of Macedonia. In short, the two letters are together concerned with the unity of the Church under the leadership of its bishops, and on the basis of correct belief as defined by their collective authority.

¹ See Humphries 1999, 149–53. Ambrose was, nevertheless, more often than not a close ally of Rome. McLynn 1994, 223–24, sees him as an essential link between Rome and the imperial court, and he was seen as such by Palladius at Aquileia. As early as *De fide* (AD 378 and 380), and *De excessu Satyri* (AD 378) Ambrose accords some sort of primacy to Rome, characterising Rome's position as that of a primacy of faith and honour: see *De excessu Satyri* 1.47; *De fide* 4.56; *Ennar. in ps.* 40.30 and, in particular, *Ennar. in ps.* 43.40, denying that the gift of keys was given to Peter exclusively, but as to the representative of the Apostles and of the bishops descended from them.

**EPISTULA 70 (MAUR. 56) TO THEOPHILUS,
BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA (392)**

Introduction

The schism at Antioch lasted from 330 to 414 with many complications.¹ It was an issue which concerned Ambrose over many years, and one which he tried to take a lead in solving on more than one occasion.

After an edict of Gratian enabled the exiled Nicene bishops to return to their sees, Antioch had two Nicene communities with two leaders, Meletius who had returned from exile, and had been consecrated on his return, and Paulinus who had remained in the city. A conflict ensued as to who was to be bishop of the city. This was temporarily settled by an agreement among Nicene clerics, among whom one Flavianus was outstanding, that when either Paulinus or Meletius died, they would not stand for election themselves, but elect the survivor to be sole bishop.² A solemn agreement to this effect was said to have been given.

But when Meletius died in May 381, while presiding over the Council of Constantinople, the council ignored the claims of Paulinus and elected Flavianus to succeed Meletius at Antioch. Flavianus was not recognised by Paulinus, who continued as the bishop of a small separate group. The West too refused to recognise the election of Flavianus, as Ambrose informed the emperor Theodosius in autumn 381 after the Council of Aquileia.³ In 388, when Paulinus was dying, he consecrated a priest named Evagrius, a friend of Jerome and of Eusebius of Vercelli, to be his successor. Both sides now had behaved improperly, but Flavianus' election at least obeyed the canonical rules set out at the Council of Nicaea (325) for episcopal elections; he also led by far the larger group at Antioch and, for these two reasons, continued to enjoy the support of the eastern bishops. In addition, he had the personal support of the emperor Theodosius. Flavianus not only had a deserved reputation for sanctity, but it was also said that his prayers and tears had induced the emperor to change his mind in 387, when he seemed

1 The most detailed and careful modern analysis is that of F. Cavallera, *Le schisme d'Antioche (IVe-Ve siècle)*, Paris 1905; see also Palanque 1933, 255–59; Pietri 1976, 1278–81.

2 Socrates, *HE* 5.5; Sozomen, *HE* 7.3; according to Theodoret, *HE* 5.3, Paulinus did not accept the agreement.

3 See below the letters on this which followed the Council of Aquileia, *Ep. ex.* 6, 8 and 9, and on them p. 231 below; also Sozomen, *HE* 7.11 and Theodoret, *HE* 5.9.

to be about to inflict severe penalties, probably involving many executions, on the citizens of Antioch to punish them for rioting and destroying statues of the emperor and his family. Evagrius' position was less strong: the Egyptian bishops held aloof at this stage – that is why they could be called on to adjudicate as neutrals on the dispute, as referred to in c.2 – while those of the West were inclined to support Evagrius as the successor of Paulinus, though they were unhappy about his uncanonical election.

After 381, the bishops of the East, and Theodosius himself, steadfastly supported Flavianus, while the western bishops continued to be unhappy about his election (not least, possibly, because matters had been settled without their being consulted). The westerners repeatedly petitioned the emperors for a full council to resolve matters.

It was not until 391, with the calling of the Council of Capua, that Theodosius agreed to allow fresh discussions, with the aim of reuniting the Churches of the two halves of the Empire. In the meantime Rome had changed its position, with Pope Siricius (385–99) indicating in a letter to an assembly of bishops at Caesarea that in his view the election of Evagrius had been uncanonical.¹ This may help to explain why he did not wish to lead a council which was to re-examine the issue, and might well decide once more against Flavianus. In the event Flavianus refused to attend the council. Instead he turned to the emperor for the support of an imperial rescript. Ambrose learnt about Flavianus' approach to the emperor in a letter from Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria,² to which *Ep.* 70 is the reply. Chapters 6–7 of the letter indicate that Ambrose and the other western bishops assembled at Capua had decided that Theophilus and the Egyptian bishops were to broker an agreement, perhaps because they still hoped that Theophilus would favour Evagrius.

The outcome was that Theophilus, in consultation with Siricius, brought together a council at Caesarea in Palestine in 393, which Theophilus himself carefully did not attend. In his absence, the assembled representatives, following the suggestions from Rome, recognised Flavianus. Theophilus

1 The letter of Siricius is cited in the synodal letter of the Council of Caesarea, cited as an authority by Severus: see E. W. Brooks, *The Sixth Book of the Selected Letters of Severus of Antioch*, London 1903, 2.1.223–34.

2 On Theophilus, the famous and notorious bishop of Alexandria (385–412), see N. H. Baynes, 'Alexandria and Constantinople', in *Byzantine Studies and other Essays*, London 1955, 97–115, esp. 105–07.

accepted their decision, as did the bishops of the East, who supported Flavianus already. This negotiated settlement paved the way for reconciliation with the West.¹

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 70 (MAUR. 56)

Ambrose to Theophilus.²

1. Evagrius has no case, and Flavianus has reason to fear and therefore avoids the investigation.³ Our brothers⁴ must pardon our justified grief: on their account the whole world has been upset, yet they do not sympathise with our grief. They should at least calmly allow themselves to be reprimanded⁵ by the people⁶ who they know are upset by their rival claims over so long a passage of time.⁷ Between these two men, neither of whom chooses to behave in a way helpful to the peace of Christ, there has after all been a grave dispute, one affecting the whole world.

2. To the victims of this shipwreck of a goodly peace, the holy synod of Capua had at last offered a harbour of tranquillity namely that all people confessing the catholic faith over all the east should be united in a single communion, and that your Holiness should be asked to undertake the investigation of these two persons, with our brothers and fellow bishops of Egypt acting equally as assessors. For we considered that the correct court would be one which, being in a fellowship of communion, was biased in favour of neither side.

3. While we were hoping that the most fair decisions of the synod had provided a solution, and that they had put an end to the conflict, your

1 See Cavallera 1905, 285ff. Evagrius died in 398, and no successor was elected to follow him, though the community he had led continued in existence until 412: see Socrates, *HE* 5.15; Sozomen, *HE* 7.15 and 8.3.

2 Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria (385–412).

3 Of the two rival orthodox bishops of Antioch, Flavianus had not appeared at the council which Ambrose had called to settle the dispute (c. 4). Evagrius attended. Ambrose was not in total sympathy with either claimant. Together with Rome and Alexandria, he did not recognise Flavianus, but Evagrius had not been canonically consecrated.

4 Flavianus and Evagrius.

5 Translating *perstringi* instead of Zelzer's *praestringi*.

6 The bishops assembled at Capua.

7 The dispute over the see of Antioch began in 330.

Holiness wrote¹ that our brother Flavianus had for a second time resorted to petitioning the emperor² for the support of an imperial rescript. So the toil of so many bishops has been expended in vain. For a second time we must submit to a secular tribunal, a second time to rescripts. Aged bishops will be disturbed a second time: weak in body as they are they will have to cross the seas. For a second time they must exchange their native land for foreign soil. A second time the sacred altars will be abandoned so that we can travel to remote places. A second time, the mass of poor bishops, who previously had not felt their poverty to be a burden, now being in need of outside assistance (for their journey), will be compelled to complain publicly about their poverty, or, at any rate to use up the sustenance of the poor for the expenses of their journey.³

4. Meanwhile Flavianus, imagining himself alone to be exempt from the law, does not come when the rest of us assemble. A usurer and his debtor meet each other, these two fellows cannot meet. Only Flavianus is deliberately absent from the company of his fellow bishops, refusing to be present, though summoned by an imperial decree and by the synod of bishops itself.

5. Even though we feel resentment at this behaviour we do not therefore allow our brother, Evagrius, the excuse that he has a good case. Evagrius thinks that he is in a stronger position because Flavianus flees from meeting him, or perhaps because he thinks that his opponent is no better than himself. Each relies on the faults of the other's ordination rather than on his own merits.⁴ We are, however, calling on both to change their ways for the better, as we would have the case of each to rest on his own merits, rather than on the faults of the other man.

6. Since you hinted in your letter that some precedent⁵ might be found on the basis of which this fraternal dispute could be resolved, and since the holy synod has entrusted jurisdiction in this case to your Unanimity⁶ and to the rest of our fellow-bishops from Egypt, it is for you to summon our

1 The present letter is Ambrose's reply to that letter of Theophilus

2 *Ad precum auxilia*, lit. 'to the assistance of prayers' i.e. to petition for an imperial rescript. As the following sentence suggests, Flavianus requested that the emperor would summon yet another council of bishops to make the decision, a council which would be more favourable to himself than that at Capua.

3 This means that they must either beg wealthy parishioners or the state for a subsidy, or most likely raid the charitable funds of their Church.

4 Reading *suis bonis fretus* suggested by Benedictine editors, as in the following sentence.

5 *Typus*.

6 *Unanimitati tuae*, a form of address 'your oneness of mind'.

brother Flavianus again, and if he persists in his intention of refusing to appear, you may decide with due regard to the decisions of the Council of Nicaea and also those of the Synod of Capua, and without damage to the general peace, to adopt such measures as will not give the impression that we are destroying what has been built up. For if I destroy what I have built up, I make myself a transgressor, even should I rebuild what I have destroyed.¹ Only let the peace which has been achieved among all be preserved, and even the refusal of one of the two parties to attend will not be able to frustrate it.

7. We certainly think that you ought to keep our holy brother the bishop of the Roman church informed, since we assume that you will reach such conclusions as could not possibly displease him as well. For the decision of your judgement will be useful, and our peace and harmony secure, only provided that what is decided on your advice does not introduce discord into our communion; so that when successive decrees of yours arrive, and we see that what has been decided has undoubtedly been approved by the Roman Church, we shall be happy to share in the benefits of an investigation carried out in this manner.

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULA* 71 (MAUR. 56A) TO THE BISHOPS OF MACEDONIA (393)

The second of the two opening letters is concerned with Bonosus, bishop of either Naissus (Nish) or Sardica (Sofia) in Illyricum, who had been discussed at Capua because of his preaching of the views of Helvidius, an opponent of the ascetic movement, and the theology of the perpetual virginity of Mary, which was closely related to it. The council had suspended him from his see, and had instructed the bishops of Macedonia to investigate the case and to reach a final judgement. Here Ambrose, writing in the name of the bishops who had met at Capua, reminds their colleagues in Macedonia to fulfil the responsibility laid on them.²

Among the theologians of his time Ambrose stood out for his emphasis on the perpetual virginity of the virgin Mary,³ and his Marian theology was closely

1 An allusion to Gal. 2.18: 'But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor'.

2 On the case, and especially the fact that the bishops of Macedonia consult Ambrose rather than Pope Siricius, see Pietri 1976, 1077–81.

3 For a brief summary see Ramsey 1997, 50–51, 92–96.

linked to his promotion of the ascetic ideal.¹ The issues surrounding the practice of asceticism among the governing classes of Italy, and the challenge to its increasing dominance in the 380s and 390s, form the background both to *Ep.* 71 as also to *Epp. ex.* 14 and 15, which oppose the teaching of Jovinianus and his teaching. Certainly asceticism was something to which Ambrose gave very strong support. Ambrose himself, his older brother Satyrus and their sister Marcellina committed themselves to celibacy, and thus to the ending of their family-line.² Ambrose claimed a virgin martyr, Soteris, as a relative, and declared her a greater glory to his family than consular ancestors.³

It is hardly surprising, then, that Ambrose's first formal written work was a handbook for virgins (*On Virgins* of 376).⁴ This was soon followed by a treatise addressing the order of widows (*On Widows* also of 376);⁵ and by a further work entitled *On Virginity* of 377.⁶ In the course of the controversy over Bonosus in AD 393 he wrote *An Instruction for a Virgin*,⁷ and finally in AD 394, when concerned with the Jovinianists at Vercelli, he wrote *In Praise of Virginity* (*Exhortatio virginitatis*).

Celibacy and asceticism are a discipline to concentrate all emotion of love on to the divine, an ideal which Ambrose liked to illustrate by means of allegorical interpretations of the *Song of Songs*, in which the bridegroom signifies Christ, and the bride either the Church or the human soul.⁸ This style of interpretation, though already present to a great extent in Ambrose's Greek sources, enabled him to express deeply held views. In his pastoral practice these convictions led him to engage in energetic recruitment of virgins,⁹ and on consistent emphasis on the high value of ascetic renunciation. It is obvious that the teachings of Helvidius, Jovinianus and Bonosus went counter to these beliefs.

1 See in the introduction to *Ep. ex.* 14, below pp. 292–94.

2 See *De virg.* 3.1: the veiling of Marcellina; *De excessu Satyri* 1.59: Satyrus' refusal to marry or make a will. Satyrus also gave up his share of the family's wealth, while Ambrose surrendered much of his to the Church of Milan on his accession. See above p. 5, and McLynn 1994, 69–70.

3 See *De virg.* 37–38; *Exh. virg.* 82.

4 *De virginibus*.

5 *De viduis*.

6 *De virginitate*.

7 *De instituto virginitatis*.

8 On Ambrose's allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* see below pp. 361–63; see also Duval 1974.

9 On his recruitment of virgins to Milan see *De virg.* 11.59 and McLynn 1994, 67–68.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 71 (MAUR. 56A)

Concerning the bishop Bonosus.

1. You have written us a letter concerning Bishop Bonosus, in which, whether from love of truth or from modesty, you wished to learn my¹ opinion. But since it was the decision of the Council of Capua that judges who are neighbours both of Bonosus and of his accusers, and especially the Macedonians, should be assigned to judge his actions, together with the bishop of Thessalonica,² we note that the judicial role in this case cannot be appropriate for us. For if the synod was still in session today, we would quite properly reach a decision about the matters included in your successive letters. Now it is up to you, who have taken on this judicial role, to reach a verdict on all counts, and to give no opportunity either to the accusers or the accused to take flight or to slip away. For you have taken responsibility on behalf of the synod for those whom the synod had decided should be tried.

2. Then, when Bonosus after your hearing had written to our brother Ambrose³ asking for his opinion whether he should break into and enter the Church⁴ which had been forbidden him, the reply to him was that there must be no precipitate action, that everything should be done with restraint and according to the rules, and that nothing contrary to your decision should be attempted, and that you to whom the synod had given authorisation, were to decide what in your opinion seemed a just decision. So the first point is that the case should be judged by those to whom jurisdiction in this matter has been given. For as we have written, it is for you to decide on behalf of the entire synod. As for us, it would not be right to sit in judgement as if the synod had authorised us.⁵

3. To be sure, we cannot deny that he has been justly censured in the matter of the sons of Mary, and that your Holiness was rightly shocked that from that same virginal womb out of which Jesus was born according to the

1 Literally 'our opinion', but the last sentence of c. 2 shows that it was written by an individual, after the synod had dispersed. See Introduction to *Epp.* 70 and 71.

2 Anysius (AD 383–406) recipient of *Ep.* 52 (Maur. 16), a response to Anysius' letter on his accession after the death of Acholius in 382/3.

3 That Ambrose is referred to in the third person might suggest that he was not the writer. But see above p. 50.

4 That is, resume the office of bishop, rather than physically break into a locked cathedral.

5 The Council of Capua has dispersed, and the bishops of Macedonia have in effect written to Ambrose for guidance.

flesh, further offspring should have been produced.¹ For Jesus would certainly not have chosen to be born from a virgin if he had thought that she would later reveal herself so lacking in continence as to allow the birth-place of the Lord's body, that palace of the eternal king, to be contaminated by the seed of human intercourse. Whoever upholds this story does nothing less than to uphold the unbelief of the Jews, who assert that he could not have been born of a virgin. If they are now to understand this on the authority of bishops, and Mary is presented as having produced several births, they will strive with all the greater determination to overthrow the truth of the faith.

4. And what about that text which has the Lord saying to his mother with reference to John the Evangelist,² *Woman behold thy son*, and again to John with reference to his mother: *Behold thy mother*? What does that signify, that when the Lord, hanging on the cross, was taking away the sin of the world, he also made a declaration about the virginity of his mother? For what other purpose did he say this other than that unbelief should close its mouth, and remain silent, and not have the audacity to outrage with some insult the mother of the Lord. He, then, who is at one and the same time the judge and the champion of his mother's chastity, is also the witness that she was betrothed only to her husband Joseph,³ and that her acquaintance with the rites of the marriage-bed did not include the practice of conjugal intercourse. For if later she was to conceive sons by Joseph, Jesus would not have wished to detach her from the partnership of her husband.

5. But if this is not enough, the evangelist added a further testimony, saying: *The disciple took her into his own house*.⁴ Is this then to be taken to mean that he caused divorce? That he robbed her of her husband and carried her off? So how can anybody who reads this in the Gospel equivocate and roll from side to side, like a shipwrecked mariner?

6. So this is the son's witness to his mother's virginity, this the rich heritage of Mary's immaculate chastity, this the last episode of entire fulfilment.⁵

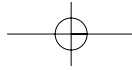
1 This was a doctrine taught by Jovinianus which was condemned by Pope Siricius in 393; cf. *Ep. ex. 14*, *Ep. Siricii*, *Ep. ex. 15* below pp. 340–45. The fact that neither Jovinianus nor his condemnation by Siricius, and following him by Ambrose and the bishops of northern Italy, are mentioned strongly suggests that the condemnation had not yet happened.

2 Jn 19.26.

3 Mt. 1.18.

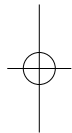
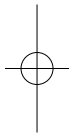
4 Jn 19.27.

5 Latin: *totius finis consummationis*.



In short he said this, and then *gave up his spirit*, completing the entire mystery [of the incarnation]¹ with the noble climax of filial duty.²

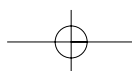
7. We have read and thoroughly perused also that section relating that Senecio has been assigned to our brother and fellow bishop Bassus³ as a colleague in the government of his Church, as well as the rest of the letter. So we now await the ruling of your verdict.



1 Latin: *consummans omne mysterium*. Ambrose's Latin verb *consummare* (to complete, fulfil) alludes to Christ's last words, '*consummatum est*', 'it is finished' (Jn 19.30), and refers at the same time to the end of Jesus' life, and to the completion of his ministry, and of the mystery of the incarnation, and finally of the fulfilment of the biblical prophecies, as in Jn 19.28: *Jesus quia iam omnia consummata sunt, ut consummaretur scriptura dicit*. (Jesus knowing that all was now finished, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, said...).

2 Latin: *pietatis*.

3 Bishop of Lodi, who took part in the Council of Aquileia of 381. Nothing else is known about Senecio.



LETTERS ON THE ALTAR OF VICTORY

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULAE* 72, 72A AND 73.¹

After the battle of Actium in 31 BC the emperor Augustus set up in the senate house a statue and an altar of Victory. On this altar senators had traditionally burnt incense and offered libations before meetings. Oaths, particularly the oath of loyalty to the emperor on his accession, were also taken there. Of the Christian emperors, Constantius II in 357 removed the altar and left the statue, but the altar was soon restored, perhaps by Julian. Jovian and Valentinian I left statue and altar alone. Gratian in 382 broke decisively with his predecessors' policy of tolerating the traditional religious rites of the city of Rome. He diverted the revenues of the Roman priesthoods to meet secular public expenses. He confiscated the properties which provided the revenues, and deprived the priests, including the Vestal Virgins, and various temple officials of their privileges, especially their traditional immunity from compulsory public duties. Gratian subsequently also renounced the title of *pontifex maximus*,² thus in effect abolishing the headship of the pagan state religion, with the consequence that henceforth there would be no one to fill vacancies in the priestly colleges, which would therefore die out.³ These measures naturally aroused great indignation in the senate, which may still have had an absolute pagan majority, but evidently had a pagan majority at least among active senators, and a delegation, led by the distinguished pagan senator Symmachus, was sent to Gratian to present the senate's protest. But they had been forestalled. At Rome, Pope Damasus had drawn up a counter-petition, signed by Christian senators, who had clearly not taken their seats in the senate when it voted

1 On the altar of Victory affair see McLynn 1994, 151–52, 166–67; Matthews 1975, 203–11. B. Croke and J. Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth Century Rome: A Documentary Study*, Sydney, 1982, 28–51.

2 Alan Cameron 1968, 96–99.

3 See also above p. 15.

to send the delegation, and Ambrose had submitted the Christian petition to Gratian at Milan. The result was that the pagan delegation was refused admittance.

By summer 384 the political situation had changed completely. Gratian was dead, and the thirteen-year-old Valentinian II was emperor. Praetextatus the praetorian prefect of Italy, Illyricum and Africa, the highest civil official in the West, was a pagan, and Symmachus was now prefect of Rome and as such presided over the senate. Exploiting the situation Symmachus, in the name of the senate, wrote his *Third Relatio* (*Ep. 72a*), an eloquent plea to the emperor to reverse Gratian's measures, and sent it to the imperial consistory. Ambrose heard that the petition had been sent, and immediately wrote a letter (*Ep. 72*) to the emperor opposing the senate's request. He asked for a full text of Symmachus' petition in order to answer it point by point, but he evidently had a good idea of its contents already. Ambrose's letter was read in the consistory and achieved its aim. Symmachus' request was refused.⁶¹ When he had already won his case, Ambrose wrote the full refutation of Symmachus' arguments, which we read in his *Collection* (*Ep. 73*), together with the text of Symmachus' *Relatio* (*Ep. 72a*).

EPISTULA 72 (MAUR. 17) TO THE EMPEROR VALENTINIAN II (384)

Introduction

Ambrose's letter opposing the submission of Symmachus speaks for itself. His basic argument is that if the altar is restored to the senate chamber, it will again have incense burnt on it, and Christian senators will in fact be compelled to participate in pagan worship.⁶² In order to disqualify the petition voted by the senate he refers to what he claims to be a larger number of Christian senators who stayed away from the senate, as Ambrose implies for reasons of conscience.⁶³ He appeals to the Christian conscience of the ruler.⁶⁴ But he also threatens. If the altar is restored Christian senators will not attend the senate,⁶⁵ and if the emperor himself comes to church he will not

⁶¹ Cf. *Ep. ex. 10* (Maur. 57) c. 3. See below p. 257.

⁶² c. 9.

⁶³ cc.10–11.

⁶⁴ c. 3.

⁶⁵ c. 10.

find a bishop there.¹ In other words he will find himself excluded from the services of the Church. One reason why Ambrose feels he can afford to be so aggressive is surely that, as he reminds the emperor, he had recently done Valentinian an extremely great service as ambassador to the usurper Maximus, and perhaps had saved his reign.²

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 72 (MAUR. 17)

Bishop Ambrose, to the most blessed *princeps* and most Christian emperor Valentinian.

1. As all people that are under the dominion of Rome serve you, emperors and princes³ of this world, so you yourselves serve almighty God and the holy faith. There is no way that salvation can be assured other than that everyone truly worships the true God, that is the God of the Christians, by whom all things are governed. For he alone is the true God, who is to be worshipped from the depths of our minds; *for the gods of the peoples are demons*,⁴ the scriptures say.

2. Now everyone is in the service of this true God, and he who undertakes to worship God with his innermost spirit offers him neither duplicity, nor prevarication, but zeal and devotion to the faith. And if he does not go as far as that, he at least ought not to display any sympathy with worship of idols and the rites of impious ceremonies. For nobody deceives God to whom all secrets, even of the heart, are crystal clear.⁵

3. And so, seeing that you, most Christian emperor, are duty bound to display your faith to the true God, along with enthusiasm for that faith, care and dedication, I am surprised that some people have conceived the hope that you are duty bound to order the restoration of altars to pagan deities, as well as to provide money for the expenses of impious sacrifices. For if you give funds that have already for a long time been claimed by the *fiscus* or the

1 cc. 13–14.

2 c. 12.

3 *Princeps*, 'first man', is often translated by its derivative 'prince', but its associations are quite different. It was chosen by Augustus, the first emperor, as a description of his position, precisely because its associations were republican.

4 Ps. 95.5 (Vulg. 96.5).

5 Cf. Rom. 2.16; 1 Cor. 14.25; Ps. 43.22 (Vulg. 44.22).

arca,¹ it will not be thought that you are only restoring to them what was theirs, but rather that you are bestowing what is your own.

4. And the people who are now complaining of their expenses are the same men who never spared our blood, who demolished the very walls of our churches from the foundations.² The same people who by a law of Julian, not long ago,³ denied our spokesmen the right of speaking and teaching, which is common to all, now also ask you for privileges, for privileges moreover which have frequently been used to entrap Christians.⁴ For their scheme was to ensnare large numbers of people by means of these privileges, exploiting the carelessness of some, and the anxiety of others to avoid disagreeable public duties. And because not all men prove strong, a substantial number lapsed,⁵ even under Christian emperors.

5. Even if these privileges had not been withdrawn already, I would show you that they ought to be abolished at your command. But seeing that they have been curtailed or forbidden over almost the whole world by several previous emperors, and that at Rome Gratian of august memory, the brother of your Clemency, withdrew them for the sake of the true faith, publishing rescripts to repeal them,⁶ do not, I beg you, tear down what has been decided in accordance with our faith, do not annul your brother's orders. If he has made any ruling in any secular matters nobody thinks that these may be disregarded, so is an order involving religion now to be trodden underfoot?

1 Does *fiscus* refer to the treasury that received taxation, which was under the praetorian prefect, or to the *res privata*, which received confiscated temple property? The *arca* may be one of a number of treasuries servicing the city of Rome, including the *arca frumentaria* which subsidised the corn supply, and the *arca vinaria* which financed distributions of wine at a reduced rate to the people of Rome. See Jones 1964, 701, 709.

2 Ambrose recalls the persecutions. The Great Persecution ended in 311, though it was resumed in the East by Maximinus.

3 *Proxima*, in fact *CTh* 13.3.5 of 362; cf. Julian *Ep.* 61; Amm. 22.10.7; 25.4.20.

4 Cf. *Ep.* 73.14. Ambrose is now referring to privileges claimed for pagan priests other than Vestal Virgins. The privileges involved immunity from compulsory public services. Ambrose claims that Christians were to be enticed into providing pagan sacrifices by the hope of immunity from troublesome and/or expensive duties they would otherwise have been obliged to perform. Symmachus, *Rel* III, does not mention these immunities, but they were evidently an issue.

5 Ambrose claims that for the sake of their immunities Christians have taken up pagan priesthoods.

6 Mentioned in *CTh* 16.10.20 of 415; for the date see Alan Cameron 1968, 96–99.

6. Let no one creep up on your youthful age. If it is a pagan [as in this case¹] who makes these demands, he should not bind your mind with the fetters of his superstition, but that enthusiasm of his should teach and admonish you with what enthusiasm you ought to show zeal for the true faith, seeing that he defends something totally devoid of truth with such passion. I too urge that deference be shown to the merits of famous men, but one thing is certain: God must be preferred to all men.

7. When there is to be a discussion of a military matter we should seek the opinion of a man experienced in battles. We should accept his advice. When the issue concerns religion, think about God. No man is slighted when almighty God is preferred to him.² That man has his opinion. You do not force a man to worship against his will what he refuses to worship. So you yourself, emperor, must be allowed the same freedom! And everyone must bear it with patience, if he cannot extort from the emperor something that he would greatly resent if the emperor wanted to extort it from himself. The attitude of a turncoat is as a rule disliked even by pagans. Everybody ought to be free to defend the sincere³ conviction of his mind, and to hold on to it.

8. But if any calling themselves Christians think that you ought to decree anything of that kind, do not let their meaningless words win over your mind, or their hollow claims deceive you.⁴ Whoever speaks in favour of this, as does he who decrees it, is in effect offering a pagan sacrifice. Even so, a sacrifice by one individual is preferable to the falling away of all. For in this case the whole Christian senate is at risk.

9. If today, which God forbid, some pagan emperor were to set up an altar to idols, and to compel Christians to assemble to be present when men are offering sacrifice, so that ash from the altar, cinders from the sacrilege, smoke from the pyre, would fill the breath and mouths of the faithful; and if in that chamber he (the emperor) were to make a proposal on which they were compelled to vote⁵ under oath at the altar of the idol (for as they

1 Of course Ambrose knew that the demand was made by pagans (c. 4) and that the man was Symmachus (c. 7) though he does not name him.

2 The man is of course Symmachus.

3 *Fidelis*, traditionally 'sincere', 'true', 'reliable', in a Christian sense 'adhering to the Faith'.

4 The reference must be to any Christian members of the imperial consistory who Ambrose fears might speak in support of Symmachus' petition. It is interesting that there evidently were Christian senators who rejected Ambrose's position.

5 Translating *sententiam dicerent*.

explain,¹ it was precisely for this purpose that an altar was placed in the *curia*, so that influenced – as they think – by its oath, each session of the senate would deliberate honestly for the common good;² even though the senate is now filled with a majority of Christians) under these circumstances a Christian, obliged to take part in a session of the senate, would consider that he was being persecuted; and this situation does sometimes happen, for they are compelled to attend, even by threat of sanctions.³ So while you are emperor, will Christians actually be forced to swear at the altar? What is the meaning of swearing an oath, if not to acknowledge the divine power of him whom you invoke as guarantor of your truthfulness? While you are emperor, does somebody actually ask and demand that you order the setting up of an altar, and the granting of money for impious sacrifices!

10. But this cannot be decreed without sacrilege. I therefore ask you not to decree it, not to make such an order, not to put your name under any such decree. As a bishop of Christ, I appeal to your faith. All of us bishops would have joined me in the appeal, if the report which reached men's ears, that something of the kind had either been proposed in your consistory or petitioned by the senate, had not been so incredible and sudden. But let it not be said that this is a petition of the senate: a handful of pagans are exploiting the title they all share.⁴ For about two years ago,⁵ when they were trying to make the same petition, the holy Damasus, bishop of the Roman Church, chosen by the judgement of God, sent me a memorandum which the Christian senators – and they were innumerable – had given him, insisting that they had authorised nothing of that kind, that they did not agree with that kind of petition of the pagans, that they were not giving their consent; complaining both publicly and privately that they would not attend the senate, if any decree of that kind was issued. Is it then worthy of your times, which are

1 This is referred to in Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.5 (= Ambrose, *Ep.* 72a.5).

2 Translating *consuleret in medium* in the light of the Symmachus passage.

3 In the earlier empire certainly fines were imposed on senators for non-attendance: Dio 54.18.3; 55.3.2; Apuleius, *Met.* 6.23. See R. J. A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, Princeton 1984, 136ff.

4 It is likely that in 384 pagans did still constitute the majority of the senate: P. Brown, 'The Christianisation of the Roman aristocracy', *JRS* 51 (1961), 1–11, reprinted in *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine*, London 1972, 162–82. Alternatively they attended more regularly than the Christian senators, for it must have been a voting majority that in 382 authorised the delegation to petition for the restoration of the altar, and again in 384 authorised Symmachus to compose his *Relatio* III.

5 In 382.

Christian times, that the dignity of Christian senators should be slighted, so that pagan senators might have their profane purpose gratified? I passed on the memorandum to the brother of your Clemency¹ on the basis of which it was certain that it was not the senate, as a whole, which had given instructions to the envoys in the matter of the cost of the rites of superstition.

11. But perhaps it will be said: 'why then were they (the Christian senators) not present in the senate when these petitions were recently drawn up?' Surely the men who stayed away express their views clearly enough. Those who spoke before the emperor have spoken clearly enough. And do we wonder that they (the pagan senators) are depriving private individuals at Rome of the freedom to oppose them, seeing that they will not allow you to be free to refuse to command something of which you disapprove, and so to remain true to your own beliefs?

12. And thus remembering the embassy that was recently entrusted to me,² I once more appeal to your faith, I appeal to your feelings; do not decide that you must reply favourably to this kind of pagan petition, nor commit the sacrilege of attaching your signature to such a reply. At any rate refer the matter to the father of your Piety, the *princeps* Theodosius,³ whom you are accustomed to consult in all matters of greater importance. There is nothing of greater importance than religion, nothing more exalted than faith.

13. If this were a civil case, the right to reply would be reserved for the opposing party. This is a case of religion. As bishop I appeal to you: Let me be given a copy of the communication that was submitted,⁴ so that I can make a fuller refutation, and subsequently let the father of your Clemency,⁵ when consulted about the whole issue, deign to produce a reply. But it is certain that if the decision goes the other way, we the bishops will not be able to bear it with indifference, and pretend that nothing has happened. You will

1 That is, to Gratian.

2 The first embassy to the usurper Maximus, on which Ambrose seems to have persuaded Maximus not to invade Italy in 382 (see McLynn 1994, 160–62). The point is that Ambrose had done a very important service to the regime of Valentinian II, which he suggests has earned him a favourable hearing.

3 Here 'father' describes the position of the emperor senior by age, though not by length of reign. Valentinian II and Theodosius were not related.

4 Ambrose asks Valentinian for a copy of Symmachus' *Relatio*. In fact it is clear that Ambrose already knows the *Relatio* quite well. If he has not seen a copy, he has heard a pretty full account of it.

5 Theodosius.

still be free to come to church, but when you get there you will find no bishop,¹ or you will find one who will resist you.

14. What will you reply to a bishop who says to you: 'The Church does not want your gifts, because with your gifts you have adorned temples of the pagans. The altar of Christ rejects your offerings with contempt, because you have built an altar for graven images. The voice, the hand and the signature are yours: the act is yours. The Lord Jesus refuses and rejects your allegiance, because you have given your allegiance to idols: for he says to you: *You cannot serve two masters.*² Virgins consecrated to God lack your privileges, yet the Vestal Virgins claim them. Why do you look for priests of God when you have overruled them in favour of the profane petitions of pagans? We cannot enter into fellowship with pagan error.'

15. What will you reply to these words? That you are a boy, and that you have lapsed?³ Every age is mature where Christ is concerned. Every age has the full experience of God. A childhood of faith is not recognised. Even young children have confessed Christ speaking fearlessly in the face of persecutors. What will you reply to your brother?⁴ Surely he will say to you: 'I did not think that I had been defeated because I left you as emperor. I was not sorry to die, because I had you as my heir. I did not grieve at abandoning power because I believed that my decrees, above all those related to the divine religion, would remain throughout all ages. These triumphal inscriptions of devoted virtue I had set up. This was the booty of a victory over the world, the plunder won from the devil, the spoils taken from the enemy of mankind, which I was offering up, to commemorate a victory, which is eternal. Of what more could my enemy⁵ have robbed me? You have abolished my decrees, which so far he who rebelled against me has not done. Now a more painful weapon is piercing my body, for it is my brother who is condemning my laws. Your act is endangering the better part of me. My death was the death of my body, this is the death of the good I have done.⁶ It is only now that my empire is being annulled, and what is more painful, it is being annulled by your followers and annulled by mine, and precisely those acts

1 *Sacerdos*, here as most often 'bishop'.

2 Mt. 6.24.

3 'Lapsed' as always has the implication of apostasy; 'boy' alludes to Valentinian's 13 years of age, which according to Ambrose is no excuse.

4 Gratian, killed in 383 by order of the usurper Maximus.

5 Maximus, the usurper.

6 'Good I have done' translates *virtutis*, literally 'of my virtue'.

are being annulled for which even my adversaries have praised me. If you have acquiesced willingly, you have condemned my faith; if you have yielded against your will, you have betrayed your own. And so to make things worse, my danger is added to yours.'

16. Again what will you reply to your father,¹ who will appeal to you with greater sorrow, saying: 'You have completely misjudged me in thinking that I collaborated with the pagans. Nobody reported to me that there was an altar in that Roman senate house. I never believed that there could be such wickedness, that pagans should offer sacrifice in the council shared by Christians and pagans alike, that pagans should insult the Christians present, and that Christians should be compelled to be present at sacrifices against their will. Many and various crimes were committed while I was emperor. I punished all that were discovered. If at that time anybody avoided detection, does this give him the right to claim that I approved of something which nobody had reported to me? Your assessment of me is as wrong as it could be, if (you think) that pagan superstition and not my own faith preserved the empire for me.'

17. And so, emperor, realising that by issuing such a decree you would be wronging first of all God, but also your father and your brother, take the action, I beg you, that you know will advance your salvation with God.

EPISTULA 72A (MAUR. 17A): SYMMACHUS' THIRD RELATIO TO THE EMPEROR VALENTINIAN II (384)

Introduction

This is *Relatio* III, of Symmachus, the petition to which Ambrose responds in *Ep.* 72 (Maur.17), and answers point by point in *Ep.* 73 (Maur.18).² Symmachus was the foremost Latin orator of his time, and his petition, which has the format and style of an oration, presented a challenge to Ambrose not only because of its subject matter, but also because of its literary qualities. Ambrose responded to both challenges. That the *Relatio* made a lasting impact is shown by the fact that Prudentius, some twenty years later, wrote a poem in two books refuting it.³

1 Valentinian I, who maintained a policy of neutrality in religious affairs (Amm. Marc. 30.9.5), and had allowed the altar of Victory to remain in the senate chamber.

2 Cf. R. H. Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor, the Relationes of Symmachus* (Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes), Oxford 1973.

3 See above p. 43.

The *Relatio* has remained famous because of the memorable formulation of its plea for religious tolerance: 'What does it matter with what philosophy each individual seeks for the truth. It is not possible to reach so great a secret by a single route.'¹ The piece derives some of its pathos from the fact that we know it to have been the last apology for the doomed religion of Rome.

Symmachus' defence of the traditional cults is appropriately traditional.² The cults should be preserved because they are an essential part of the ancestral institutions of the Roman people, and their efficacy has been demonstrated by the success of the Roman people over many centuries. 'If long passage of time gives religious practices their authority, we must keep faith with so many centuries, and we must follow our parents, as they prosperously, followed theirs.'³ This is an argument which is relevant not only to the defence of religion, but to every kind of traditional institution.

The affair of the altar of Victory did not cause widespread interest at the time. The ecclesiastical historians do not mention it. Zosimus, who wrote the history of this period from a pagan point of view, does not mention it either. In his *History* there are two episodes which mark the renunciation by the Roman state of its ancestral cults. The first is Gratian's refusal to accept the title of *pontifex maximus* and to wear the pontifical robes.⁴ The second is a law which Zosimus claims to have been issued by Theodosius I in 394, which abolishes the expenditure of public money on pagan sacrifices.⁵ What gave the episode of 384 its lasting fame was the renown of the two protagonists, Symmachus and Ambrose. Gratian may have thought that in removing the altar he was simply 'eliminating an insignificant anomaly',⁶ and in retrospect we may well agree that that is what his action amounted to. But the removal of the altar of Victory from the senate chamber against the wish of what may well have been the majority of active senators nevertheless marked, and as it were symbolised, a transformation of the most far-reaching importance.

1 c. 10.

2 Cf. the speech of Cotta in Cicero, *De natura deorum* (*On the nature of the gods*) 3.2 (5–6).

3 c. 8.

4 Zos. 4.36.

5 Zos. 4.59.

6 Cf. McLynn 1994, 151.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 72A (MAUR. 17A)**Submission of Symmachus, prefect of the city of Rome.**

1. As soon as the most noble senate, ever your loyal subject, noted that crimes were being subjected to laws, and observed that pious princes were cleansing the notoriety of recent times, it was moved by inspiration of this happy age to belch out a long-suppressed grief, and it has instructed me as envoy to convey its grievances for a second time, after an audience with the late¹ emperor had been refused me by disreputable men,² precisely because otherwise justice would not have failed me, my lords and emperors Valentinian, Theodosius and Arcadius, glorious, victorious, and triumphant, ever Augusti.³

2. I am therefore performing a twofold duty: as your prefect I am attending to public business, and as envoy I am delivering the instructions given me by my fellow citizens. There is no conflict of interests here. For men have now ceased to think that they can prevail through the support of men at court if their views are unrepresentative. To be loved, to be courted, to be treated with affection, now counts for more with the imperial power.⁴ Who could bear it if private quarrels were found to have harmed the public good? The senate rightly attacks those who have given their own power precedence over the reputation of the prince. It is our work to keep watch on behalf of your Clemency. If we defend the customs of our ancestors, the laws and destiny of our country, what stands to gain more than the glory of the present age, glory which will be all the greater when you realise that you have no license to do anything that is contrary to the custom of our forbears.

3. So that is why we ask you to give us back that status of religion, which has been of benefit to our commonwealth for so long. At any rate let us 'count

1 'The late', literally the 'deified'. Emperors were traditionally deified after their death, but it is unlikely that the ceremony was performed for Gratian, killed by the usurper Maximus in 383. The ultimate fate of his body is unknown.

2 Among them Ambrose and Pope Damasus. Cf. above p. 66.

3 The letter is formally addressed to all three reigning Augusti, though it was intended for Valentinian II.

4 The argument is that formerly ambitious senators intrigued at court against the decisions of the senate as a whole. Now no longer, because the new emperor wishes to be liked by his subjects, and will not grant favours which are against wish of the majority. In 382 Pope Damasus, with help from Ambrose, had undermined an attempt by the senate to get the altar restored. Symmachus is assuring the emperor that this kind of thing is not being attempted now, or at least had no support in the senate. In fact Ambrose's *Ep.* 72 shows that the opposition was already going into action.

the emperors',¹ emperors who belong to either school, to either persuasion. The earlier rulers practised the rites of our fathers, the more recent did not abolish them. If the piety of the old does not provide a precedent, let the policy of turning a blind eye² of the more recent ones³ do so. Who is on such good terms with the barbarians as not to need the altar of Victory? We are apprehensive about the future, and therefore avoid omens of that kind.⁴ If the honour has been denied to the divinity, let it at least once more be paid to her name. For your Eternity owes much to Victory, and will owe more still. Let those men shun this power, who have gained no benefits from her. But as for you, do not reject the patronage, which favours our triumphs. Everybody devoutly desires⁵ to possess this force.⁶ Nobody should deny that it is right to venerate a force, which he admits to be exceedingly desirable.

4. But even supposing that it would have been wrong to refrain from causing this bad omen, surely it was fitting at least not to lay hands on the decorations of the senate chamber. Permit us old men, I beg you, to transmit to our descendants what was passed on to us when we were boys. Love of tradition is a great thing. It was altogether right that that act of the deified Constantius did not remain in force for long.⁷ You should refrain from following any precedent, which you know to have been soon abolished. We are concerned for the perpetuity of your reputation and name, to make sure that a future generation will find nothing to criticise.

5. Where are we to swear to observe your laws and decrees? What religious sanction⁸ will deter the dishonest mind from lying when giving evidence? All things are full of God, and nowhere are perjurers safe; but the

1 'Count the senate!' was said to the consul by a senator who opposed a bill, and believed that there was no quorum of senators present.

2 *Dissimulatio*.

3 Notably Valentinian I.

4 Traditionally the removal of an altar of Victory would be considered an omen of coming defeat.

5 *Votiva*: both 'to be desired', 'prayed for', and 'prayed to'. Like much of this passage it makes sense whether you understand 'victory' in the sense of success in battle, or of the goddess of victory.

6 In this paragraph I have translated *potestas* with 'power' and *potentia* with 'force'.

7 *Divi Constantii*: literally 'the deified' Constantius. According to Ambrose, *Ep.* 73.32, Constantius had the altar removed when he visited Rome in 357, but it was soon put back, perhaps after Constantius' departure, by the senators themselves. Julian is nowhere credited with the return of the altar of Victory.

8 *Qua religione*.

mere presence of religion can be a very powerful deterrent to wrongdoing. That altar sustains the harmonious unity of all the senate. That altar strengthens the good faith of each individual, and nothing contributes more to the authority of our decisions than that the house reaches all decisions,¹ as it were, under oath.² So our deconsecrated chamber will lie wide open to perjury. Can it really be that my noble emperors, whose safety depends on a public oath of loyalty, will judge this state of affairs to be acceptable?

6. But the deified Constantius, it is argued, did the same. Then let us rather imitate other actions of that emperor. He would surely not have attempted anything of that kind, if somebody else had already made that mistake before him. For a mistake on the part of a predecessor is a lesson to the successor, and censure of past error leads to its being corrected. It was perfectly right for the ancestor of your Clemency not to shrink from giving offence in an unprecedented situation. Surely it is not proper for us to use the same excuse, if we imitate an act that we remember to have met with disapproval?

7. Let your Eternity be reminded of other actions of the same emperor, which are more worthy of your imitation. He did not take away any of the privileges of the Vestal Virgins. He filled up the priestly colleges with men of noble birth. He did not deny their expenses to the rites of the Roman state, and following a joyful senate through all the streets of the eternal city, he gazed on the shrines with serene expression, read the names of the gods inscribed on their gables, inquired after the origins of the temples, expressed admiration of their founders, and while he himself followed different rites, he preserved these for the empire.³

8. For everyone's customs, everyone's cults are his own. The divine mind assigned different cults to different cities to be their protectors. As souls are assigned to men at birth,⁴ so guardian spirits⁵ are allotted to peoples to rule their destinies. There is also the fact of utility, which more than

1 *Ordo decernit*.

2 *Quasi iuratus*: The presence of the altar of Victory in the curia lends a religious aura to the proceedings. So the senators do not formally take an oath, but they feel constrained to behave piously. Ambrose in *Ep.* 72.9 implies that Christians would have to swear at the altar, surely an allusion to this passage.

3 Amm. Marc. 16.10.4 has a vivid account of Constantius' tour of Rome, remarking on his impassive expression.

4 See the imaginative words of P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, London/Chicago 1981, 50–54.

5 *Genii*.

anything else convinces men that gods exist.¹ For since reason is totally in the dark, surely knowledge of the gods comes to us most directly through memory and records of past success? If long passage of time gives religious practices their authority, we must keep faith with so many centuries, and we must follow our parents as they, prosperously followed theirs.

9. Let us now suppose that Rome² herself is standing here in your presence, and is addressing you with these words: 'Best of emperors, fathers of your country, have respect for my years, which pious observance of our rites has given me. Allow me to live by the ancestral ceremonies, for I do not repent of them. Let me live by my own custom, I am, after all, freeborn. This worship subjected the world to my laws. These sacrifices drove Hannibal from my walls,³ and the Senones⁴ from the Capitol.⁵ Was I then only preserved for this, that I should be scolded as a very old woman?

10. I needs will see what kind of innovation it is that they think must be introduced, but to make old age to change its ways is both too late, and humiliating'.⁶ That is why we now ask for peace for the gods of our fathers, our native gods.⁷ It is reasonable to think that whatever is worshipped by each of us is ultimately the same. We look at the same stars. We share the sky. The same universe surrounds us. What does it matter with what philosophy⁸ each individual seeks for the truth. It is not possible to reach so great a secret by a single route. But that is a topic for leisured academic discussion. It is prayers that we are offering you now, not debating points.

11. What profit did your sacred treasury derive from withdrawing of the privileges of the Vestal Virgins? Are the most generous of emperors withdrawing what even the most niggardly have granted? Honour is the only

1 Cf. Ovid, *Ars amatoria* (*The Art of Love*) 1.637: It is expedient that there should be gods.

2 The speaker is Roma, the personification of Rome. Like the personification of victory, the personification of Rome could be thought of either as a symbol of everything the city stood for or as a deity.

3 Hannibal unsuccessfully marched on Rome in 211 BC (Livy 26.11).

4 The Senones are said to have led the Gallic invasion of AD 390 (Livy 5.35.3).

5 The Gallic band briefly captured Rome in 390 BC (Livy 5.41–42), but thanks to the sacred geese failed to capture the capitol (Livy 5.47.4).

6 With Croke and Harries I take this sentence to conclude the speech of Rome. Zelzer takes the first person 'I' of *videro* to be Symmachus. On that interpretation it would have to be translated, 'I will indeed go on to consider...' But Symmachus does not go on to consider the nature of the innovation. He goes on to make a philosophical point.

7 *Diis patriis, diis indigetibus* echoes Virg. *Georg.* 1.498. The precise meaning *indigetibus*, translated 'our native gods', is uncertain.

8 *Prudentia*.

thing they gain as a result of those privileges, which are, as it were, their wages for chastity: that they have immunity from public duties is considered the badge of honour of their priesthood, just as their headbands are an ornament of their heads.¹ They ask for only the bare title of the privilege, since they are protected from actual expenditure because of their poverty. So the people who deprive them of material possessions actually contribute rather more to their reputation. For virginity dedicated to the public good grows in merit when it is without reward.

12. The integrity of your treasury should have nothing to do with income of this kind. The exchequer of good emperors ought not to be filled at the expense of priests, but with plunder from enemies. Can any amount of profit compensate for the odium? Yet avarice is not in accord with your character. This fact makes those who are deprived of their ancient subsidies even more unhappy. For under emperors who keep their hands from other people's property, who fight against their own greed, an exaction which is not motivated by the covetousness of the exactor has no other purpose than to damage the victim.

13. In addition the exchequer retains lands left to the Virgins and ministers of religion in accordance with the wishes of the dying. I beg you, who are the priests of justice, that the right to succeed to private legacies be restored to the cults of your city. Let men dictate their wills free from worry, and let them know that under emperors who are not rapacious, what they have written will stand. Allow the human race to enjoy that happiness, and let it bring joy to you also. The precedent of this case is beginning to worry the dying. Shall it be said that Roman law does not apply to Roman religious institutions? What should one call the seizure of properties which no law, no crisis has made forfeit?

14. Freedmen receive legacies. Appropriate benefits² under the terms of a will are not denied to slaves. Only Virgins of noble birth, and the ministers of the sacred rites linked to our destiny, are excluded from properties that are theirs by the rights of inheritance. What is the advantage of dedicating one's virginity to the public safety, and of giving to the eternity of the empire the support of heavenly protection, of conciliating friendly powers to watch

1 *Muneribus*: compulsory public duties which might only involve administration, but more often than not heavy expenditure as well. Symmachus argues that the Vestals' immunity was entirely honorific, as their poverty meant that they would not have been called up for *munera* in any case.

2 *Iusta commoda*.

over your armies and your eagles,¹ of undertaking effective vows for the benefit of all, yet not to share with all the protection of law? And so even the condition of a slave, bound to the service of men,² is preferable. We are damaging the state, which never benefits from being ungrateful.

15. Let no one imagine that I am defending the cause of religion alone. From evil deeds of this kind have sprung all disasters of the Roman race. The law of our parents honoured the Vestal Virgins and the ministers of the gods with a modest living and deserved privileges. This endowment remained unaltered until the time of the corrupt moneychangers,³ who diverted the allowances owed to holy chastity to pay the wages of the lowly dock-workers.⁴ This action was followed by a general famine, and a scanty harvest disappointed the expectations of all provinces.⁵

16. This is not the fault of the soil. We do not blame the scorching south wind. Rust did not injure the crops, nor did weeds kill the corn. The year's produce was dried up by sacrilege. It was inevitable that what was being denied to religious obligations would be lost to all. If there is any parallel to this calamity,⁶ by any means let us attribute even this great famine to annual variation, but the cause that produced crop failure as extensive as this must be very grave indeed. Bushes in the forest are keeping people alive, and the country folk in their need have once again resorted to the trees of Dodona.⁷

17. Did the provinces ever suffer anything of this kind while public emolument was feeding the ministers of religion? When were oaks shaken for human consumption, when were the roots of plants torn up, when did it happen that mutually dependent regions were unable to make up each others' shortage through borrowed fertility,⁸ as long as sacred virgins shared the

1 That is, the legionary standards which were surmounted by the figure of an eagle.

2 *Hominibus impenditur*: 'bound to the service of men' as opposed to priests who serve gods.

3 *Trapezitae*. On Roman *nummularii* and *collectarii* see Symmachus *Relatio* 29.

4 *Baiuli*. The operation is obscure.

5 Bad harvest in Africa in 383 (Symmachus, *Ep.* 4.18); famine at Antioch in 382–83 (Libanius, *Or.* 1.205ff.) and in 384–85 (Libanius, *Or.* 1.227–28, 233; *Or.* 29 *passim*; *Or.* 27.6–8, 11, 25–29). As prefect of the city in 384 Symmachus was worried about the food supply. Insufficient corn had come from Africa (*Relatio* 18), there was a shortage of oil (*Relatio* 35.2), the emperor had sent some extra supplies (*Relatio* 6), but Symmachus hoped for more (*Relatio* 7).

6 *Huius mali aliquod exemplum*.

7 They were compelled to live on acorns. Dodona was the site of an oracular oak.

8 On earlier occasions it had been possible to compensate for poor harvests locally by importing corn from regions where harvests had been better.

free corn supply¹ of the Roman people? The public provision for the priests promoted the fertility of the soil: it was an aid to productivity rather than a hand-out. Can there be any doubt that a gift has always provided plenty for all, when it [i.e. its withdrawal] is punished by shortage for all?

18. Someone will say that a public subsidy has been denied merely to the expenses of a foreign religion.² May good emperors never take the view that what has in the past been assigned to particular individuals out of public funds remains at the disposal of the exchequer. For as the commonwealth is made up of individuals, so what is paid out by it again becomes the property of individuals. Your rule governs everything, but you safeguard for each his own, and with you justice prevails over license. At least consult your own generous feelings whether what you have transferred to others is still to be considered public property. Resources once and for all donated to honour our city cease to belong to those who have donated them, and what at the outset was a free gift becomes by time and usage an entitlement.

19. If anybody insists that unless you take on yourself the odium of those who are now withdrawing the donation, you are conniving with those who originally made it, he is trying to intimidate your godlike³ mind with a fear that is groundless. May the mysterious guardians of all the sects be gracious to your Clemency, and especially they who in the past helped your ancestors. May they defend you! May they be worshipped by us! We plead for the return of that establishment of religion, which preserved the empire for the deified father of your Highness,⁴ which furnished an emperor enjoying good fortune and legitimate heirs.

20. From his citadel in the sky, the senior deified ruler⁵ looks down on the tears of the priests, and thinks that he personally is being criticised by the abolition of a practice which he had gladly preserved. Do a favour also to your deified brother,⁶ and by correcting a policy that was not his own, hide

1 Translating: *annona*. See G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome*, Oxford 1980; B. Sirks, *Food for Rome. The Legal Structure and the Transportation and Processing of Supplies for the Imperial Distributions in Rome and Constantinople*, Amsterdam 1991.

2 The cults could be considered foreign because they were no longer the religion of the Roman state, which was now Christian. This was not of course Symmachus' view, but certainly Ambrose's.

3 *Divino*.

4 Valentinian I.

5 Still Valentinian I.

6 Gratian.

an act which, unknown to him, had offended the senate. For it is agreed that the embassy was denied access precisely so that he should not hear the judgement of the council of state.¹ You will therefore be furthering the reputation of earlier times,² if you do not hesitate to abolish an act that needs to be shown not to have been that of an emperor.

EPISTULA 73 (MAUR. 18): AMBROSE'S FORMAL REPLY TO SYMMACHUS (384)

Introduction

As we have seen this oration was composed when the controversy over the reversal of Gratian's measures had already been decided against the pagans. It is a systematic refutation of Symmachus' *Relatio* III, which Ambrose presumably intended to be a decisive presentation of the Christian case in the event of the question of the restoration of the altar of Victory and the funds of the Roman cults being raised again. But the object of his speech is wider than that. Ambrose was concerned to discredit the ancient religion once and for all. In his refutation of the arguments used by Symmachus, and in fact by earlier apologists of the traditional religion, Ambrose argues as a rationalist, and the claims of tradition are answered by pointing out examples of progress in human affairs.³ Ambrose moreover has no difficulty in showing that the Romans' experience of success or failure in war had not been related to the piety or otherwise they had displayed in performing their ancestral ritual.⁴ He can also point out that the Carthaginians, famously defeated by the Romans, had been just as pious towards the same pagan gods.⁵ He argues that if Gratian's anti-pagan measures had indeed been followed by famine in some regions for some time, the famine had since ceased, and these same measures had not prevented good harvests in other regions. These ups and downs in agricultural production are simply a result of the natural mutability of the

1 'Council of state' translates *iudicium publicum*, i.e. the senate. Symmachus' embassy of 382 is also mentioned in c.1.

2 Cf. in c.1: 'observed that pious princes were purging the notoriety of previous times'. Symmachus ends his speech on the same theme as he began it.

3 For ancient ideas of progress see E. R. Dodds, *The Ancient Idea of Progress and Other Essays in Greek Literature and Belief*, Oxford 1972, 1–25. Ambrose's use of the theme was taken up and developed by Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 2.270–334.

4 cc. 4–7, 35,

5 cc. 6, 37.

climate, and not punishment sent by the offended gods.¹ As a believer in progress, Ambrose can oppose Symmachus' argument that ancestral traditions which had proved themselves over many centuries should not be easily discarded, by pointing out that since the days of their ancestors 'all things have progressed for the better'.² But when Ambrose responds to Symmachus' plea that 'so great a secret cannot be reached by a single route', rationalism is replaced by confident assertion based on authority. 'How can I possibly believe you, who admit that you are ignorant of what it is that you worship ... What you seek with misgivings, we know with certainty directly from the wisdom and truth of God',³ that means from God's words recorded in the Bible.

Ambrose contrasts the readiness of Christian martyrs to suffer torture and death for their religion with the complaints of Vestal Virgins and pagan priests because they are losing their financial privileges. He implies that the whole controversy is not about religion but about money.⁴ This is a polemical insinuation, but it has nevertheless been interpreted by several scholars as the fundamental issue in the affair of the altar of Victory. So J. A. McGeachy concluded that 'the select group of pagans who had so much power in Rome felt that the victory of Christianity over paganism presaged for them a severe economic loss'.⁵ But Ambrose's interpretation deliberately avoided what for the pagans was the central issue. The cults of Rome were public not private religion. They cemented the relationship between the Roman people collectively and its gods. It was therefore essential that they should also be financed by the Roman people collectively.

A further attempt to get the altar of Victory restored was made in 389, when another senatorial delegation petitioned Theodosius I. Ambrose again opposed it, and although Theodosius seems to have hesitated, the petition was again rejected.⁶ In 392, Valentinian II at Vienne received yet another senatorial delegation on the same subject, shortly before his death and once

1 cc. 20–21.

2 cc. 23–29.

3 cc. 7–8.

4 cc. 11–16.

5 *Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West*, dissertation of the University of Chicago, 1929. McGeachy's thesis was developed by F. Paschoud in 'Réflexions sur l'idéal religieux de Symmaque', *Historia* 14 (1965), 215–35. It has been refuted in a review by N. H. Baynes, *JRS* 36 (1946), 175–77 = N. H. Baynes, *Byzantine and Other Studies*, London 1955, 361–66.

6 *Ep. ex.* 10.4 (Maur. 57); see below p. 257.

more rejected their request.¹ After the death of Valentinian II, the usurper Eugenius did not restore their resources to the cults, but granted them to certain pagan senators as individuals.² Subsequently the altar of Victory was restored also.³ After Eugenius' defeat all these concessions to the pagans were once more withdrawn. But the statue of Victory, which had been treated not as an idol, but as a work of art, had never been removed from the senate chamber, and was allowed to remain there.⁴

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 73 (MAUR. 18)

Ambrose the bishop to the most blessed prince and most clement emperor Valentinian Augustus.

1. When Symmachus, the most distinguished⁵ prefect of the city had petitioned your clemency that the altar which had been removed from the *curia* of the city of Rome should be returned to its place, and you, emperor, though inexperienced as a young recruit in the springtime of your years, were nevertheless showing yourself to be a veteran as regards the power of your faith, and not giving your assent to the prayers of the pagans,⁶ I submitted a pamphlet as soon as I heard of the matter. Though I covered everything that needed to be said in that pamphlet, I also demanded that a copy of the petition should be given to me.

2. It is therefore not because I am uncertain of your faith, but because I foresee your carefulness, and am certain that you will examine it in a spirit of piety,⁷ that I reply to the claims of the petition with these words, begging of you only one thing, to be aware that it is not elegance of language, but weight of argument that you must expect. For as our divine scripture teaches, the tongue of the wise and learned is golden.⁸ It is endowed with

1 *Ep. ex.* 10.5 (Maur. 57); *De obitu Valentiani* 52; see below p. 388.

2 *Ep. ex.* 10.6 (Maur. 57).

3 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 26.

4 Claudian, *De sexto consulatu Honorii*, ed. M. Dewar, Oxford 1996, verses 597–602, and the discussion pp. 392–95.

5 *Clarissimus*: the epithet of rank of a senator.

6 Note that Ambrose suggests that Valentinian was rejecting the pagan request even before he had received Ambrose's first petition.

7 Wood and Walford translate: 'but as providing for the future and assured of righteous judgement'.

8 Pr. 15.2.

ornamented speech, reflecting a glitter of shining eloquence like the brightness of a rich colour, it captivates the eyes of the mind by its elegant form, and holds them fast by its appearance. But if you test gold carefully with your hand, its value is on the surface, the inside is mere metal. Similarly, handle and examine, I beg you, the sect of the pagans. They give off a rich and grandiose sound, but they defend an exhausted case, emptied of truth.¹ They talk of God; they worship an idol.²

3. In his petition the most distinguished prefect of the city put forward three points, which he considered valid: that Rome demands what he calls her ancient cults; and that priests and Vestal Virgins ought to be paid the wages that are due to them; and that when the priests were deprived of their wages general famine followed.

4. In his argument, Rome herself with tearful words of complaint weeps, as he claims, for her ancient ceremonies, and asks for them to be brought back.³ 'These rites', she says, 'repelled Hannibal from my walls,⁴ the Senones from the Capitol'.⁵ And so while he is proclaiming the power of the cults he is betraying their weakness: for it would seem that Hannibal managed for a long time to treat the Roman cults with contempt, and though the gods were fighting against him, he advanced victorious right up to the walls of Rome.⁶ Why did people who had the arms of their gods fighting on their side allow themselves to be besieged?

5. As for the Senones, what is there for me to say? The surviving Romans would not have so much as resisted them, though they were actually breaking into the sanctuary of the Capitol, if the goose had not given the alarm with its frightened hissing.⁷ Observe the quality of the protectors of the Roman temples! Where was Jupiter in that crisis? Was he perhaps talking from inside a goose?

6. But what need is there for me to deny that their sacred rites fought for the Romans? After all, Hannibal too worshipped the same gods. So which of these alternatives do they prefer? Let them choose! If the cults won on the Romans' side, they must have lost on the side of the Carthaginians. If they

1 *Veri effeta* echoes Virg. *Aen.* 7.440, 452: *verique effeta senectus*.

2 The altar of Victory.

3 Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.9.

4 Livy 26.11.

5 Livy 5.47.4.

6 In 211 BC.

7 For the story how the geese saved the capitol in 390 BC, see Livy 5.47.4.

triumphed on the side of the Carthaginians, they were of no advantage at all to the Romans.

7. Away therefore with this hateful complaint, [supposedly] of the Roman people! Rome herself has not authorised it. She interrupts them [i.e. the pagans] with words of a totally different character: 'Why do you stain me every day with the useless blood of harmless herds? Trophies of victory derive not from the entrails of cattle but from the strength of warriors. It was with quite other disciplines that I subjugated the world. It was by fighting that Camillus brought back the standards that had been taken from the Capitol, after he had slain the Gauls who had triumphed over the Tarpeian rock.¹ Courage laid low those whom cults failed to repel. What need to mention Atilius, who fought even to the death.² Africanus won his triumph fighting amid the battle-lines of Hannibal,³ not among the altars on the Capitol. Why, I ask, do you bring up all these examples involving our ancestors? I hate the rites of the Neros.⁴ Need I really recall emperors who reigned for no more than two months, or the rulers whose accession was instantly followed by their downfall? Or is it perhaps something altogether new that barbarians have crossed over from their territory? And what about those two emperors, one of whom was taken captive, setting a wretched and novel precedent, while in the reign of the other the whole world was taken prisoner?⁵ Did they not demonstrate that their rituals, which promised victory, deceived them? Surely they were not Christians? Surely nobody will maintain that in those days too there was no altar of Victory? I am ashamed of my past errors. White-haired with age, I blush at all that disgraceful shedding of blood.⁶ But after a long life, I do not blush at becoming a convert at the same time as the whole world. It is undeniable that no age is too old to learn.⁷ Let old age blush, only when she cannot mend her ways. White-haired age is to be praised not for her years, but for her

1 'Tarpeian rock', the site of Jupiter's temple, i.e. the location Jupiter could be expected to defend before any other. On Camillus' supposed annihilating victory over the Gauls see Livy 5.49.1–7, though without mention of the standards.

2 On Atilius Regulus see Horace, *Odes* 3.5.13–56.

3 Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal at the battle of Zama in 202 BC, see Livy 30.32–35.

4 The Claudii Neroni were a branch of the patrician Claudii. The emperor Nero was perhaps the last, certainly the most notorious of the line.

5 Valerian was captured by the Persians in AD 260. His son Gallienus (AD 260–68) reigned through the worst years of the crisis of the third century.

6 That is, animal sacrifices.

7 Cato, *dist.* 3.1; Seneca, *Ep.* 76.3.

8 Wis. 4.8–9.

morals.⁸ To change to the better side is nothing to be ashamed of. That I did not know God is the one thing I once had in common with the barbarians. Your sacrifice is a rite of being splashed with blood of beasts. Why do you look for utterances of God in dead animals? Come, and while you still are on earth, acquaint yourselves with the service of heaven. We live here, but we serve there. I want God himself, who made the world, to teach me the mystery of heaven, not some human being, who did not know himself. Whom am I to believe about God, if not God? How can I possibly believe you, who admit that you are ignorant of what it is that you worship?¹

8. 'So great a secret', he says, 'cannot be reached by a single route'. But what you do not know, we have learnt from the voice of God, and what you seek with misgivings, we know with certainty directly from the wisdom and truth of God. Our objectives and yours are therefore not the same. You pray for peace for your gods from our emperors, we ask for peace for the emperors themselves from Christ. You worship the work of your hands.² We consider it wrong for anything, which can be made with hands, to be thought God. God does not want to receive worship in stones.³ After all even your philosophers have laughed at the idea.⁴

9. But if you do not believe that Christ is God, because you do not believe that he died⁵ – for you do not realise that Christ's death was of his flesh, not of his divinity, the divinity that has brought to pass that nobody who now believes in him will die – what could be more short-sighted than you, seeing that you insult as you worship, and disparage as you honour? You think that your god is a block of wood. What an insulting kind of adoration! You do not believe that Christ can have died. What reverential perversity!

10. But he says: 'ancient altars should be restored to their statues, and ancient ornaments to their temples'. These objects should be reclaimed from one who shares his superstition. A Christian emperor has learnt to honour no one but Christ. Why do they force pious hands and faithful lips to serve their sacrilege? The voice of our emperor must ring out with the name of Christ,

1 Allusion to Acts 17.23.

2 Wis. 10.13ff.

3 For this *topos* of apologetics cf. Min. Fel. 20.2; Tert. *Apol.* 12.6, 14.7; Lact. *Div. Inst.* 2.2.14.

4 Varro, cited in Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 4.31, thought image worship a corruption of an originally imageless worship of the Romans; see also Strabo 16.2.35.

5 The pagans think that if Christ was God he could not have died, and if he died he was not God.

he must declare only the God whom he knows, *for the heart of the king is in the hand of God.*¹ When did a pagan emperor ever set up an altar to Christ? As they demand the return of the past, they instruct Christian emperors by their example how much respect they owe to the religion which they profess, seeing that the pagans have bestowed every effort on their superstitions.

11. Our beginnings occurred long ago, and now the pagans are shut out, as we once were. We glory in the blood spilt by the martyrs. They are upset by expense. We consider such things a victory, they, a grievance. They never did us a greater favour than when they ordered Christians to be whipped, proscribed and slain. Our religion transformed into a prize what godlessness intended as a torture. Note their high-mindedness: our cause has grown through insults, through want, through execution. They believe that their rites cannot survive without subsidy! He says: 'Let the Vestal Virgins have their immunity!' That is the way people must talk, who are unable to believe that there can be virginity without reward. They must attract by the prospect of profit, for they have no confidence in virtue. But how many virgins have the promised rewards gained them? With difficulty they have got seven girls to be Vestals. That is the total which has been gathered by the consecrated headbands, by the dye of the purple robes, by the glamour of being carried in a procession through the city on a litter, surrounded by an escort of attendants, by very great privileges, huge hand-outs, and last but not least, by a time-limit to virginity.²

12. Let them use their powers of perception, both of eye and mind, let them observe the people of chastity, the nation of righteousness, the virgin assembly. No ornamental band adorns their head, but a veil, humbly utilitarian, yet nobly chaste. They are not eagerly on the lookout for devices to enhance their attractiveness; they totally renounce them. They have no ornaments of purple, do not indulge in wanton luxuries, but are used to fasting. They are without privileges, without profit. In short their whole way of life is such that you might expect their sense of vocation to fade as they discharge their duties. But in fact as they discharge their duties, their enthusiasm is challenged. Chastity is perfected by its own sacrifices. Virginity, which has been bought for a price, instead of being preserved by a passion for virtue, is not true virginity. Righteousness, which is acquired by bidding, as at an auction, and for a limited term, is not true righteousness. The first

1 Shortened from Pr. 21.1.

2 Vestals served until they were forty.

triumph of chastity is to conquer all desire for worldly goods. For a desire for wealth is a temptation to modesty. But let us suppose that all virgins are to receive generous assistance. In that case, what bounty will flow to the Christians? What treasury will be able to afford such huge expense? Or if the pagans think that the subsidy is to be offered only to the Vestals, they ought to be ashamed, that as long as the emperors were pagans they claimed the whole amount for themselves, and that now when the emperors are Christians, they do not think that they should share the allocation with us.

13. They also complain that public food allowances¹ are not paid to their priests and religious officials.² What a noisy storm of words this has produced! But recent pieces of legislation denied us the right to inherit even from private individuals,³ and nobody is complaining. For we do not think it a wrong, because we do not grieve over the loss of money. If a Christian priest were to seek the privilege of exemption from curial duties, he would have to give up all possession of paternal and ancestral goods, and in fact all property. If the pagans had this grievance, just imagine how they would protest that a priest must buy the leisure he needs for his religious duties⁴ with the loss of his entire patrimony, that he must purchase the occupation of serving the community at the cost of all his private possessions. But as he professes to keep vigils for the salvation of all, let him find consolation⁵ in the reward of private poverty, because he has not sold his services but has gained grace.

14. Compare the two cases. You want to claim exemption for a decurion, when the Church is not allowed to claim exemption for a priest.⁶ Wills are written that benefit ministers of temples. Nobody is disqualified from inheriting because of his impiety, no one even of the humblest condition, no one who has wasted his reputation. Of all men, only the cleric is excluded from this common right, though on behalf of all men, he alone offers up commu-

1 That is, *annona*, the payment in kind paid to imperial employees.

2 *Ministris*: I have often kept this as 'ministers', they are obviously humbler religious functionaries than the *sacerdotes*.

3 *CTh* 16.2.20 of AD 370.

4 *Feriae ministerii*.

5 I have translated *soletur* instead of Zelzer's *solatur*.

6 This sentence shows that the immunity from public services claimed for the pagan ministers of religion at Rome was exemption from the decurionate. Evidently these functionaries were recruited from decurions of municipalities. Numerous laws state that the Christian priesthood did not enjoy this immunity.

nal prayers, and shoulders communal duties. He is allowed no bequests, not even from sober widows, and no donation. Though no fault is found in his way of life, a fine is inflicted on his office. What a Christian widow bequeaths to the priests of a temple is valid, what to the ministers of God is invalid. I have made this point not in order to complain, but so that the pagans understand why I am not complaining. For I would rather have us poorer in money than in grace.

15. But they argue that what was donated or bequeathed to the Church in the past has been left inviolate. True, but let them also say whether anybody has seized donations from temples? This is something which has been done to Christians, so that even if it had been done to pagans, it would be retribution rather than injustice. But now at last they appeal to justice, and demand fairness? Where was that sentiment then, when after plundering all Christians of their possessions, they grudged them even the breath of life, and denied to them what has never been denied to the dead, a congregation for the last rite of burial? Pagans flung the bodies into the seas: the seas returned them. That they should now be reviling the deeds of their ancestors is a victory of our faith. But, alas, what logic is there in petitioning for gifts made by persons whose actions they condemn?

16. In fact nobody has deprived the temples of their donations, or the college of soothsayers¹ of its legacies. Only estates have been confiscated,² and this, for the reason that they did not use them in a manner worthy of religion, though they defended their possession by right of religion. They cite us as a precedent,³ why did they not also copy our sense of duty?⁴ For her own benefit, the Church owns nothing, except her faith. These rents and these revenues (to which they refer) the Church gives away. The possessions of the church are expenditure on the poor. Let them count up how many captives their temples have ransomed, what nourishment they have offered to the poor, to how many exiles they have given resources for a livelihood. That is why their estates have been taken away, but their legal rights have not.

17. But look what happened: the action was avenged, so they claim, by a general famine, 'to expiate the grim guilt of sacrilege',⁵ just because some-

1 *Haruspices*.

2 Estates of temples were confiscated together with civic estates from soon after 364: see W. Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, Oxford 2001, 175–76.

3 That is, the fact that the Church's estates were untouched.

4 *Officio*.

5 Virgil, *Aen.* 2.184: *nefas quae triste piaret*.

thing that used to be of benefit only to the priests began to benefit everyone! That is why, so they say, men with failing strength tore away the bark and their lips licked¹ the exposed timber for its scanty sap. That is why substituting the Chaonian acorn for grain,² and being reduced to the fodder of cattle, the foodstuff of a miserable livelihood, they alleviated their desperate hunger in the woods³ by shaking [acorns from] oak trees. Do they really believe that these calamities are prodigies, which have never before happened on earth, and that they did not occur as long as pagan superstition flourished all over the world? In fact, in the past, how often⁴ has a harvest of empty stalks mocked the prayers offered by the tight-fisted farmer,⁵ and the country folk been disappointed in their search for the green stalks of the crop they were seeking from the furrows!⁶

18. And why did the Greeks attribute oracular powers to their oaks,⁷ if not because they believed that the resort of food from the woods was the gift of their heavenly religion? That is the kind of favour they expect from their gods. They offered up the poor fodder of their field⁸ in honour of the groves of Dodona. Who but a pagan people has ever worshipped those oaks? Is it not extremely unlikely that their gods in their anger have inflicted as a punishment, what, when they were appeased, they used to grant as a favour? What kind of justice would that be, if the gods because they were angry that a few priests had been deprived of their livelihood refused a livelihood to everybody? The punishment would be far crueller than the original offence. Theirs is not an adequate explanation for something that has produced such misery in our failing world,⁹ so that the anticipated crop of the year perished all at once, while the corn was still green.

1 *Ora lambabant*, a Virgilian combination (*Aen.* 2.211).

2 Reversing the progress of civilisation in Virg. *Georg.* 1.8.

3 Cf. Virg. *Georg.* 1.158.

4 *Quando* translated as if it was *quotiens*.

5 Cf. Virg. *Georg.* 1.226.

6 Cf. Virg. *Georg.* 1.134. Ambrose has phrased his ironical description of famine in Virgilian reminiscences, at the same time demonstrating his familiarity with the classics, and proving that occasional crop-failure has always been a risk of farming.

7 Virg. *Georg.* 2.16.

8 That is, seed-corn. The translation is that of Croke and Harries.

9 The idea that the world is old and failing is classical, most memorably expressed by Lucretius 5.246ff. Ambrose alludes to it as an alternative 'Roman' explanation of the failure of the crops, but for Christians this world could never be expected to be anything but imperfect.

19. It is in fact very many years ago that the rights¹ of temples were abolished all over the world. Has it only just now occurred to the gods of the pagans to avenge the wrong done to them? Can we really believe that the Nile omitted to overflow its banks in the usual way, because it wanted to avenge losses of the priests of the city of Rome, when it had not avenged the losses of its own priests?

20. But let that be! For if they think that last year the wrongs done to their gods were avenged, why have they been totally ignored this year? For now the country folk are not feeding on roots plucked out of the ground,² nor are they searching for berries in the forest to relieve their hunger, nor snatching their food from thorn-bushes, but they are happy at the success of the year's work, and marvelling at their own harvest,³ and with their prayers more than fulfilled, their fast is fully satisfied. The earth has yielded us its crop with interest.

21. Who then is so unfamiliar with human affairs that the mutability of the climate from year to year takes him by surprise? And yet we know that even last year several provinces produced abundant crops. Need I mention that the Gallic provinces were better off than usually? The Pannonian⁴ provinces sold corn which they had not sown,⁵ and the Second Raetian⁶ province suffered from envy provoked by its fertility: for the province which is normally reasonably safe from invasion because of its sterility has attracted a hostile invasion by its fertility.⁷ The autumn harvest was sufficient to feed Liguria⁸ and the Venetian provinces. It would therefore appear that even last year the harvest was not totally withered by sacrilege, while this year has been prosperous, with produce rewarding faith. Can they also deny that our vineyards have produced an overflowing crop? We have therefore gathered the harvest with interest, and we are enjoying the bounty of a more than usually abundant vintage.

1 *Iura*: Ambrose probably means the confiscation of the estates of temples to the *res privata*, which must have happened early in the reign of Valentinian I.

2 Virg. *Aen.* 3.649ff.

3 Virg. *Georg.* 1.103.

4 Part of modern Hungary.

5 Perhaps they had bought corn abroad in anticipation of a shortage and then found that they did not need it.

6 Switzerland. *Ep.* 30.8 mentions an invasion of Rhaetia by the Alamannic Iuthungi, which was checked by a force of Huns and Alans.

7 In 384 the Roman general Baudo led an army into Raetia (Switzerland), ostensibly to repel an invasion of Iuthungi, though the usurper Maximus claimed the force threatened his own position. See Ambrose, *Ep.* 30.8 (Maur. 24).

8 Northwestern Italy.

22. Finally, there remains the most important question of all: whether you, the emperors, ought to restore the subsidies because they have been of benefit to yourselves. For Symmachus says: 'Let them defend you, let them be worshipped by us.' This is something, most faithful princes, which we find insufferable, that they reproach us by saying that they are praying to their gods in your name, and that without authorisation from you, they are committing the monstrous act of sacrilege, treating your turning a blind eye as if it were positive consent. Let them keep their means of protection to themselves, and let them defend their own – if they can. For if they cannot defend those by whom they are worshipped, how can they defend you, who do not.

23. But Symmachus says: 'the cult of our ancestors must be preserved'. What about the fact that since those days all things have progressed for the better? The world itself, in its beginnings, condensed to form an unstable sphere from the seeds of the elements, which had been brought together through the vastness of empty space.¹ Earlier still it was enveloped in the darkness of the chaos of the yet unshaped work,² and at a later stage, when heaven, earth and sea had been made distinct from each other, the world received the pattern of things which gives it its beauty. Shaking off the damp mists, the lands marvelled at the new sun.³ In the beginning the day was not bright,⁴ but in the course of time, with the increase of light, it became bright and warm.

24. The moon itself, which according to the oracles of the prophets prefigures the beauty of the Church,⁵ on its first rising, while it is being renewed⁶ for its monthly cycle, is hidden in the shadows of the night, then progressively filling in its crescent,⁷ or rather uncovering it opposite the sun, at last gleams with all the splendour of its radiant brightness.

25. Once upon a time the land did not know what it is to be drilled into producing crops. However, when the careful farmer began to give orders to

1 Echoes Virg. *Buc.* 6.31–38. But the use of the progressive evolution of the world and of mankind as an argument in favour of replacing the old religion by the new is not of course Virgilian.

2 A periphrasis of Gen. 1.2.

3 Virg. *Buc.* 6.37.

4 Gen. 1.5: 'day' created. Sun, moon and stars are created later in Gen. 1.14ff.

5 Ambrose, *Hexameron* 4.8.32–39.

6 Cf. Horace, *Odes* 4.7.13.

7 Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 3.645.

the fields,¹ and to dress the uncultivated soil with vineyards, the land was softened by these domestic attentions, and put off its rugged character.²

26. The first season of the year which colours the fields with a uniform appearance³ is bare of produce,⁴ then as time goes on it blossoms out in flowers soon to fade,⁵ and finally achieves maturity with crops.

27. We too in our uninstructed childhood think like children, but as we grow older we lay aside that immaturity of mind.⁶

28. [To be consistent] they really ought say that everything should have remained as it was in its beginnings: that the world, which was once shrouded in darkness, now displeases them, since it has been illuminated by the brightness of the sun. And yet, how much more welcome it is to have driven away the darkness of the mind than that of the body, and for the ray of faith to have shone forth than the rays of the sun. So the youthful condition of the world, as of everything else, has given way in order that the venerable old age⁷ of 'grey haired faith'⁸ can take its place. If any are upset by this, they must find fault with the harvest, because it has taken time to ripen; they must find fault with the vintage, because it arrives in the fall of the year; they must find fault with the olive because it is the latest of crops.

29. Therefore our faith too is a harvest, a harvest of souls. The grace of the Church is a vintage of good works, which has been growing in holy men since the beginning of the world, but it is only in the most recent times that it has spread among the different peoples; so that by this all men might perceive that the faith of Christ has not wormed its way into minds that were still unformed, for there can be no crown of victory without an adversary, but that the truth was preferred, as it should be, only after the established view had been hissed off the stage.

30. If the ancient religious practices of Rome pleased them so well, why did that selfsame Rome adopt foreign ones? I pass over the earth hidden

1 Virg. *Georg.* 1.99.

2 Virg. *Georg.* 2.51.

3 Zelzer: *hic locus corruptus videtur*. Peter Walsh (personal comment) has suggested reading *quae agros visu coloravit*.

4 Cf. Sallust, *Iug.* 79.6.

5 Cf. Horace, *Odes* 4.7.9–11: *ver proterit aestas / interitura simul, Pomifer autumnus fruges effuderit* (spring is trampled down by summer, only to perish as fruit-bearing autumn pours out its harvest).

6 Echoes 1 Cor. 13.11.

7 Wis. 4.8ff.

8 Virg. *Aen.* 1.292.

under expensive structures, and shepherds' huts gleaming with the gold typical of a degenerate age.¹ But in order to meet the very point that they are complaining about, I will ask them why in the past they were so envious of ceremonies of alien superstition, that they took over the statues and defeated gods of captured cities, and the rites of foreigners. Where, for instance, did they find the original model for the ceremony of Cybele washing her chariots in a pretended river Almo?² Where did they get the Phrygian prophets, and where did they get the divine power³ of treacherous Carthage with its everlasting⁴ hatred for the Romans – that same divinity worshipped under a variety of name, whom Africans worship as Caelestis, Persians as Mithras,⁵ and very many as Venus?⁶ Similarly they have taken up the belief that victory too is a goddess, although it surely is a [divine] gift, not a divine power. Victory is bestowed, it does not rule. It is won thanks to the legions, not by the effectiveness of cult. How can victory be a great goddess, when credit for it is claimed by a body of soldiers, and it is in any case bestowed by the outcome of battles?⁷

31. They petition for the altar of this goddess to be set up in the senate chamber of the city of Rome, that is, in a place where a majority of the assembly are Christians. There are altars in all the temples, an altar even in the temple of Victories. Since they take pleasure in numbers, they perform their sacrifices everywhere. To insist on the sacrifice on one particular altar is nothing else than to insult our faith. Is it to be borne that a pagan sacrifices in the presence of a Christian? 'Let them inhale', he says, 'let them inhale, even against their will, the smoke into their eyes, the music into their ears, the ashes into their throats, the incense into their nostrils, and let the ashes stirred up from the altar spray their faces, even when they have turned away in disgust'. Are they not content with the baths, the colonnades, and the

1 The hut is the supposed hut of Romulus on the Palatine. Ambrose expects his readers to agree that flaunting of gold and riches is 'foreign', un-Roman.

2 Ovid, *Fasti* 4.337ff. On 27 March the image of Magna Mater (Cybele) was ceremoniously washed in the river Almo.

3 *Numina* (plural), but the reference is surely to Juno, with whom the Romans identified the Carthaginian Tanit, cf. Virg. *Aen.* 7.310: *si mea numina* [Juno's] *non sunt magna satis* (if my powers are not sufficiently great).

4 *Semper invisa Romanis*: the reference is to Juno's hostility to Aeneas, as in Virg. *Aen.* 1.36ff.

5 Aphrodite and Mithra are identified by Herodotus, 1.131.

6 The translation is rather free.

7 Cf. Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 4.14–17.

streets, all crammed with images? Are we all of us not even to be shown the same respect in this assembly which we all share? Will the conduct of the pious part of the senate¹ be bound by an oath sworn by men calling the gods to witness, and swearing by their religious rites? If they refuse to be so bound, they will seem to have discreditable intentions,² if they acquiesce they will be seen to commit sacrilege.

32. He asks: 'Where shall we swear allegiance to your laws and commands?' It seems that your mind, which is bound by the laws, [nevertheless] needs pagan ceremonies to frame its opinion and to sustain its credibility.³ At this point not only the faith of the senators attending the senate, but also of those absent, and what is more, your own faith, emperors, is under attack. For when you order, you compel.⁴ Constantius of august memory, though he had not been baptised into the sacred mysteries, thought that he would be defiled if he saw that altar. He ordered it to be taken away. He did not order it to be put back.⁵ The removal has the authority of an imperial act, the restoration does not have the authority of an instruction from the emperor.

33. No one may delude himself about what is happening, because he is not there. He who is of one mind with it is more truly present at a gathering than he who is an eyewitness. For it matters more to be united in mind than to be joined in body. The senate looks to you, as its presidents, to call its meetings. It assembles on your behalf. It resigns its conscience to you, not to the gods of the pagans. The senators value you above their children, but not above their faith. Such affection is worth cultivating. Such affection is more valuable than the imperial power, provided that the faith is safe, for the faith protects the power.

34. But it may be that some are impressed by the thought that an emperor who was most devoted to the faith has been so totally abandoned.⁶ That is to assess the value of goodness by the fleeting circumstances of our present life. What wise man does not know that the transactions of human life take

1 That is, the Christian senators.

2 The oath before each session, whose terms we do not know, evidently bound the senators to truthfulness, as well as obedience to the laws and loyalty to the emperors.

3 *Fidem stringit*. In the following sentence *fides* is clearly the Christian faith, but here its meaning is 'truthfulness / credibility'. Ambrose is replying to Symmachus' *Third Relatio* (= Ambrose, *Ep.* 72a) 5.

4 If Valentinian assents to the senators swearing by pagan gods, his command will be binding on Christian senators.

5 It seems to have been tacitly restored soon after Constantius had left Rome.

6 Gratian.

place on a kind of sphere or revolving wheel, and that they do not consistently meet with the same success, but their condition changes and they undergo alternation?

35. What man sent out from the temples of Rome was more successful than Gnaeus Pompeius? But after he had circled the world with three triumphs, he was defeated in battle, fled from the war, and while exiled from the boundaries of his empire, he met his end at the hands of a eunuch of Canopus.¹

36. Have all the lands of the east ever brought forth a man more famous than Cyrus, king of the Persians? He too, after he had conquered the most powerful kings opposing him, and had spared the conquered, perished, being routed by the arms of a woman. And this king, who had even granted the defeated the honour of sitting with him at table,² had his head cut off and placed in a wine skin filled with blood and was made a laughing stock by the commands of a woman.³ In the narrative of his life, like is not only not requited by like, but by its very opposite.

37. Do we know anybody who was more dedicated to performing sacrifices than Hamilcar, the general of the Carthaginians, who during the whole of a battle stood between the lines of the combatants offering sacrifice, and when he saw that part of his army had been defeated, threw himself into the ritual flames he was tending, to extinguish them with his own body, since he had realised that they were of no avail to him?⁴

38. As for Julian, what need I say? He destroyed his own means of retreat, because he had unwisely trusted the responses of soothsayers.⁵ So all men are liable to disaster, but not all because of the same failing. Nobody for instance has ever been misled by promises of ours.

39. I have answered those who have provoked me, as if I had not suffered provocation. For it has been my aim to refute their address, not to expose their superstition. However, emperor, this address of theirs ought to make you more careful. For when, arguing from the behaviour of previous emperors, he asserted that the early emperors had practised the ancestral

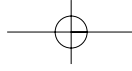
1 Pompey, known as 'the Great', the famous Roman commander and politician, who was defeated by Caesar at Pharsalus and sought refuge in Egypt, where he was murdered in 48 BC.

2 Croesus, see Herodotus 1.86.

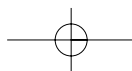
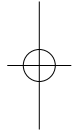
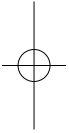
3 Herodotus 1.214. Her words were: 'I will make you drink your fill of blood'.

4 Hamilcar was a Carthaginian leader of the Magonid family who landed in Sicily in 480 BC, but was defeated at the battle of Himera, and according to Carthaginian legend immolated himself. See Herodotus 7.166–67.

5 Amm. Marc. 24.7.4 relates how Julian, during his Persian campaign, burnt his fleet.



cults, and that their successors had not abolished them, he drew the conclusion: 'if the piety of the old emperors is not to be followed as an example, the turning a blind eye of the more recent ones ought to be!' With these words he clearly taught you that you owe it to your faith not to follow the example of pagan cult, and that you owe it to your loyalty to your family not to overturn your brother's decrees. For if the pagans have praised the turning of a blind eye by emperors, who though they were Christians did not abrogate the decrees of pagans, and this merely for the sake of their faction, how much more ought they to concede to your fraternal love, namely that you, whom they want to turn a blind eye at something even though you perhaps do not approve of it, must on no account diminish the laws of your brother. And now decide on the course, which you judge consistent both with your faith and the obligations of filial piety.



LETTERS ON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM

EPISTULA 74 (MAUR. 40) = EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 1A TO THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS (388/89)

Introduction

In the winter of 388/9, not long after the defeat of Maximus,¹ a synagogue and a meeting place of the Valentinian sect were burnt by rioters at Callinicum, a small fortress town on the Euphrates. Theodosius thereupon ordered the *comes Orientis* to make the local bishop rebuild the synagogue, and to put on trial and punish the persons accused of causing the destruction. Ambrose protested at once, and the emperor had actually withdrawn the order that the bishop should rebuild the synagogue before Ambrose had written either of his two letters. So Ambrose wrote his first letter, numbered *Ep. ex. 1a*, and also included an edited version as *Ep. 74* in the *Collection*, after the emperor's order had already been withdrawn, and demands that the emperor should also remit the trial and punishment of the alleged incendiaries.

The editing received by *Ep. 74* prior to its being included in the collection is slight. In her edition Zelzer has listed ten passages in which the version in the *Collection* differs from that *extra collectionem*.² In this translation the alternatives from *Ep. ex. 1a* are included in brackets. Only two of these change the meaning at all significantly. Capitolinus, the name of a martyr in *Ep. ex. 1a.17*, has been omitted from *Ep. 74*. Ambrose had found out that Capitolinus was the name of the governor and not of the martyr, and has corrected the mistake. A much more important change has been made to c. 32. The version outside the *Collection* ends with the sentence: 'So outstanding a display of piety as this and such faith in God will be eclipsed by your present act.' The last sentence of *Ep. 74.32* and the whole of c. 33, leading up to the sentence: 'I for my part have done all I could while showing due

¹ See above p.17.

² *CSEL* 82.10.3, xx-xxiii.

respect to get you to hear me in the palace, so that it might not become necessary for you to hear me in church' are missing from *Ep. ex. 1a*. They have been added for publication. So while the editing of the bulk of the letter has been insignificant, the final addition, Ambrose's threat that he will repeat the petition (or rather demand) in the presence of the congregation during a public church service, does change the whole tone of the letter, turning it into an ultimatum.¹

As has been mentioned, the opening of *Ep. 74* is misleading. Ambrose had taken up the matter before writing this letter, and had done so with considerable success,² for he had already persuaded the emperor to rescind the order that the bishop must rebuild the synagogue.³ Nevertheless the first eight chapters of the letter relate the story as if Ambrose was now reporting it for the first time. In other words he provides information which the emperor had already discussed with his advisers, and even acted on. It is information which the emperor did not need, but which a wider readership would need in order to understand the letter. This strongly suggests that the letter, at least in the form in which it has come down to us, was from the first intended for the general public as well as the emperor. This would mean that, like letter 73, it is essentially a set piece rhetorical argument. Perhaps Ambrose is not really pleading with Theodosius to take a particular action in the particular case of the synagogue at Callinicum: he is deploying his rhetorical armoury to argue the general proposition that the Christian state must not assist non-Christian worship in any way, not even to the extent of giving it the protection of the law. Ambrose, the son of a high Roman official, and himself a former provincial governor, must have been well aware that what he was advocating was absolutely contrary to Roman administrative tradition. It is, however, perhaps not as shockingly irresponsible as it would seem, because extreme rhetorical exaggeration was assumed by everybody, and allowance made for it.

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA 74* (MAUR. 40) =
*EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 1A***

Ambrose the bishop to the most clement prince and most blessed emperor Theodosius Augustus [Ambrose to Theodosius the emperor]

¹ The reason why Ambrose made this addition is discussed below pp. 111–12, 215.

² *Ep. ex. 1.1*.

³ *Ep. 74.9*.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 97

1. I am ever harassed by an almost continuous succession of worries, most blessed Emperor, but I have never been in a state of such perplexity as now, when I see that I must take precautions in case I too have to bear some of the blame for an act of sacrilege. So I beg you to listen patiently to what I have to say. For if I am unworthy to be heard by you, I am also unworthy to offer sacrifice for you, to be trusted with your vows and your prayers. So will you really not listen to the man whom you would want to be heard praying on your behalf? Will you not hear him speaking on his own behalf, whom you have heard speaking on behalf of others [whom the Lord is to hear speaking on behalf of others]?¹ And are you not apprehensive about your own verdict, that when you declare me unworthy of being heard by you, you may declare me unworthy to be heard on your behalf?²

2. But as it is not the part of an emperor to deny freedom of speech, so it is not that of a bishop to refrain from saying what he thinks. For no quality is so popular and loveable in you who are emperors as your cherishing of freedom,³ even in the case of those who are your subordinates in the imperial service.⁴ In fact this is the difference between good and bad princes,⁵ that the good love freedom, the bad slavery. But in a bishop nothing is so dangerous before God or so disgraceful among men as not to state freely what he thinks. As indeed scripture has it: *And I used to speak of thy testimonies before kings, and I was not put to shame*;⁶ and elsewhere: *Son of man, I have made you watchman for the house of Israel*;⁷ the point being that *if the just man turns away from justice, and does wrong, because you have not told him the difference*, that is because you did not tell him what must be shunned, *his righteous deed will not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand*.⁸ *Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because you pointed out the difference, and you will have saved your own life*.⁹

1 *Ep. ex. 1a: pro aliis audiat dominus.*

2 That is, unworthy to be heard by God when interceding on the emperor's behalf.

3 In this context, above all freedom of speech.

4 *Militia* covers imperial service whether in the army or in the civil service.

5 *Principes*: this distinction between good and bad *principes* goes back to the time of Augustus, and is a principal theme in the historians of the early empire.

6 Ps. 119.46 (Vulg. 118.46). Vulg. reads *loquar* and *confundar*, i.e. future for Ambrose's imperfect.

7 Ezek. 3.17.

8 Ezek. 3.18.

9 Ezek. 3.21.

3. Therefore, emperor, I would rather be your partner in good than in evil, and for the same reason a bishop's silence ought to be displeasing to your Clemency, his freedom pleasing. For you will be implicated in the danger of my silence, while you will benefit from the good of my outspokenness.¹ I am not therefore being a nuisance by intervening where I ought not, intruding on another's business, but doing my duty, obeying the commands of our God. And I am doing this chiefly from love of you, for your sake, desiring to preserve your safety. But if you either do not believe me, or you forbid me to act on this motive, then I will certainly speak out from fear of offending God. For if my danger could acquit you, I would expose myself patiently, though not gladly, on your behalf; for I would prefer you to be accepted and glorified by God without any danger to myself. But if the guilt of my silence and my dissembling inculcate me without freeing you, I would prefer you rather to think me rude rather than useless and dishonourable. For as scripture has it, in the words of saint Paul the Apostle whose teaching you cannot refute: *Be urgent in season and out of season, convince, exhort and rebuke, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.*²

4. So I too am dealing with one whose displeasure is more dangerous to incur; especially, as even emperors are not displeased if a man does his duty, and you hear patiently everyone who speaks up for his own office, indeed you reprimand him if he does not make use of his military rank. What therefore you readily accept from civil servants and soldiers³ in your service surely cannot be thought offensive when coming from bishops, since we say not what we want but what we are ordered to say? You know the reading: *When you stand before kings and governors do not be anxious how you are to speak, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*⁴ Nevertheless if I were speaking of political issues, although justice is to be observed in that area as well, I would not be gripped by such anxiety if I were not heard. But in a case involving God, whom will you listen to if you not hear the bishop, who incurs greater danger by his sin. Who will dare tell you the truth, if the bishop does not?

5. I know you to be devoted, clement, gentle and calm, having the faith and fear of the Lord in your heart: but some traits often evade our notice.

1 *Libertas*.

2 2 Tim. 4.2.

3 *Qui vobis militant* covers both military and civilian officials of the emperor.

4 Mt. 10.18–20.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 99

*Some have zeal for God, without being enlightened.*¹ I consider that we must take care that this failing too does not slip into the minds of the faithful. I know your devotion towards God, your mildness towards men; I am under an obligation to you for benefits of your favours. And for that reason I fear the more, and am more greatly worried that you may subsequently judge me guilty, because it was through my dissembling, or perhaps my currying of favour, that you did not escape your fall from grace. If I saw a sin being committed against myself I ought not to remain silent, for it is written: *If your brother sins against you, first rebuke him between you and him alone. Then censure him before one or two witnesses. If he does not listen to you,*² *tell it to the church.*³ Shall I then not declare the cause of God? [So you realise, emperor, that I am unable to neglect the cause of God.]⁴ Let us therefore consider what it is that worries me.

6. The count of the East charged with military affairs⁵ has reported that a synagogue was burnt, and that this had been done at the instigation of a bishop. You have ordered the other participants to be punished, and the synagogue to be rebuilt by the bishop himself. I will not insist that the bishop's statement should have been awaited. For it is normal for bishops to restrain crowds and to be lovers of peace, except when they are themselves roused by some wrong done to God, or by an insult to the Church. But granted that this bishop was somewhat too zealous in burning the synagogue, and too craven when indicted, are you, emperor, not afraid that he will comply with your judgement?⁶ Does it not worry you that he may become an apostate?

7. Are you not also apprehensive at the possibility of his speaking out against the count? For in that case the count will have to make the bishop either an apostate or a martyr. Either alternative would be alien to the spirit of your reign, each would amount to persecution, if he were compelled to choose between apostasy and martyrdom. You see in what direction the outcome of this case is moving. If you think the bishop is brave, take care that he does not become braver and choose martyrdom; if you think him frail of

1 Rom. 10.2. Vulg. has *aemulatio* instead of *zelum*.

2 Vulg. reads 'them'

3 Mt. 18.15–17 shortened.

4 This sentence is not in *Ep. ex. 1a*.

5 The *comes Orientis*. The office was in fact a civilian one. The official was evidently unwilling to reach a decision on his own initiative. It is also significant that he reported to Theodosius in the West and not to Arcadius at Constantinople.

6 That is, he would rebuild the synagogue, which Ambrose claims would be apostasy from Christianity.

purpose, avoid his becoming frailer and falling from grace. He who forces the weak to fall¹ incurs the greater guilt.

8. In these circumstances, I think that the bishop will say that he himself raised the fire, assembled the crowds, and led the people, so as not to lose the opportunity for martyrdom. He would thus substitute a robust victim for feeble ones. O blessed falsehood, by which a man wins acquittal for others, and grace for himself! This, Emperor, is what I too have demanded, that you should rather turn your punishment on me, and if you think the action a crime, that you should attribute it to me. Why do you pronounce sentence against absentees? You have a culprit who is on the spot, one who admits the charge. I declare that I burnt the synagogue, or at any rate that I instructed them that there should be no building where Christ was denied. If I am faced with the further question why I have not burnt the synagogue here, [I reply that] since it had already caught fire by act of God, my participation was not required. And to be frank, I was rather slower to do so, because I did not think the deed would be punished. Why should I have done something, which in the absence of one who would punish me would win me no reward? These words cause me some embarrassment, but they ask for a favour in return: that nothing be done to offend the supreme God.

9. Let us assume, however, that nobody summons the bishop to perform this task,² as I requested of your Clemency; and even though I have not yet read that your order has been repealed, let us assume³ that it has been.⁴ What if others, somewhat more timid in their fear of death, offer that the synagogue should be repaired at their own expense, or if the count, when he learns of this earlier decision, should himself order the building to be reconstructed at Christians' expense? Emperor, you will have a count who is an apostate, and you will entrust the victorious standard, the *labarum*, sancti-

1 *Lapsi* were Christians who yielded to pressure to sacrifice during a persecution; but here the 'lapse' would be into apostasy.

2 *Munus*, i.e. the rebuilding of the synagogue.

3 *Constituamus*.

4 This is a very significant qualification. It shows that the whole letter so far has been a kind of shadow boxing. Ambrose is not only arguing for a specific concession, he is presenting a history of the case for the record, and to serve as guidance for the future. In the same spirit Ambrose wrote *Ep.* 73 after he had already won his point, in order to present the full argument against ever allowing public funds of a Christian state to be used to subsidise pagan cult. Cf. above p. 62.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 101

fied by the name of Christ,¹ to this man who is to rebuild the synagogue. Just order the *labarum* to be brought into a synagogue. Let us see whether there is no resistance.

10. So will a building be put up for the perfidious practices of the Jews, be constructed out of the spoils of the Church, and will the patrimony which has been acquired by Christians by the favour of Christ be transferred to the offerings of that perfidious people?² We read of temples long ago built for idols from the booty taken from the Cimbri,³ and the spoils of other enemies. Are the Jews to inscribe the façade of their synagogue with the inscription: 'The temple of impiety, built out of booty taken from the Christians'?

11. But considerations of public order⁴ are perhaps what influence you, emperor. What then is more important, a show of public order, or the cause of religion? Severity⁵ ought to give way to devotion.

12. Have you not heard, emperor, that when Julian had ordered the temple at Jerusalem to be repaired, the men who were clearing away the rubble were burnt by fire from heaven?⁶ Should you not take care that the same does not happen in this case as well? Surely you ought not to have given an order like that given by Julian.

13. Why are you so angry? Is it because some public building or other has been burnt, or because it was a synagogue? If you are moved to anger by the burning of even the most worthless buildings – for what else could there be in such an obscure fortified settlement⁷ – do you not remember, emperor, how many mansions of prefects have been burnt at Rome⁸ without anyone exacting punishment? On the contrary, if some emperor wished to display marked severity, he came down more heavily on the man who had been shattered by so great a loss.⁹ So, if there must be punishment, which act

1 *Labarum*: the imperial military standard, bearing a crown, a cross and the initial letters of the name Jesus Christ, which was introduced by Constantine.

2 *Perfidorum*.

3 A German migrating tribe from northern Jutland defeated by Marius in 101 BC.

4 *Ratio disciplinae*.

5 *Censura*: Wood and Walford 1881: 'Police should give place to religion'.

6 Socrates, *HE* 3.20; Sozomen, *HE* 5.22.

7 *Castrum*: the word is used increasingly for a fortified town in late antiquity, but Ambrose uses it here to disparage Callinicum, which was in fact a city.

8 For example, Amm. Marc. 27.4, 8.

9 That is, the emperor was more severe on the victim, the prefect, than on the crowd who set the house on fire, on the ground, presumably, that the prefect had provoked the crowd by his misgovernment, especially in conditions of famine, cf. Ambrose, *De officiis* 3.7.

should be thought more deserving of it, the burning of buildings in some part of the township of Callinicum, or in the city of Rome? At Constantinople recently the residence of the bishop [recently the residence of the Constantinopolitan episcopate]¹ was burnt,² and the son of your Clemency³ interceded with his father that you should not exact punishment, either for the wrong done to himself, the son of the emperor, or for the fire at the bishop's residence.⁴ Are you not worried, emperor, that if you order punishment to be exacted in the present case, your son will once more intervene to prevent the punishment? But on the earlier occasion it was right for the father to delegate the act of pardon to his son. For it was fitting that the son should be the first to pardon an insult to himself.⁵ On that occasion it was good that there was a division of roles, with the act of pardoning shared, so that the son was asked to pardon the insult to himself, and the father the insult to his son. In the present case there is nothing for you to delegate to your son; see that you do not detract from the rights of God.⁶

14. There is no good reason therefore for so much agitation, that people should be so severely penalised because of the burning down of a building, much less so because the building burnt down was a synagogue, a site of perfidy, a house of impiety, a refuge of madness, which God himself has condemned. For so we read in the words of our Lord God spoken through the mouth of Jeremiah: *And I will do to the house on which my name is invoked, and in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim. And as for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up your prayer for them, and do not intercede*

1 The slightly different version in *Ep. ex. 1a* is bracketed.

2 Socrates, *HE*. 5.13. In AD 388 when Theodosius was on campaign against Maximus an Arian mob burnt the residence of Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople.

3 Arcadius.

4 Arcadius was left as at least nominal ruler of the East in his father's absence. The burning of the bishop's house was a double insult, to Arcadius as emperor in residence, and to Theodosius because an insult to his son was an insult to himself.

5 Arcadius must have forgiven the wrongdoers before he pleaded for them with his father. Ambrose characteristically has not stated explicitly that he did, but his argument depends on the assumption.

6 The present situation and the arson at Constantinople have in common that both incidents occurred in the east, where Theodosius' son Arcadius was, at least formally, the emperor. Ambrose is asking Theodosius to deal with an incident at the furthest boundary of the Empire, which it would be natural to let Arcadius and his ministers at Constantinople deal with.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 103

with me, for I shall not hear you. Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah?¹ God does not allow himself to be petitioned on behalf of those who you think should be defended [whom you are defending].²

15. If I was conducting a case in accordance with the law of nations,³ I would now be stating how many basilicas of the Church were burnt by the Jews in the time of the reign of Julian: two at Damascus, one of which has been inadequately repaired, and at the expense of the Church not of the Synagogue, while the other basilica is still a jagged mass of shapeless ruins. Basilicas have been burnt at Gaza, Ascalon, Beirut and nearly all towns of that region, and no one has called for punishment.⁴ Jews and pagans have burnt a basilica at Alexandria, the most beautiful of all.⁵ The Church will not be avenged; will the Synagogue be?

16. Will punishment be exacted also for the burning of a temple of the Valentinians?⁶ For what should we call a place of assembly of pagans if not a temple? Admittedly pagans call on twelve gods,⁷ while these people worship thirty-two aeons, whom they call gods.⁸ For I have learnt that on behalf of these people too an order has gone out, and instruction has been given, that punishment should be exacted from monks. For when the Valentinians blocked the route along which the monks were advancing in procession to

1 Jer. 7.14–17.

2 Brackets enclose the version of *Ep. ex. 1a*.

3 *Ius gentium*: that part of Roman civil law open to citizens and non-citizens alike.

4 All these are places are in an area of Syria / Phoenicia in which paganism was long strong, and where there was a strong anti-Christian reaction under Julian, but one led not by Jews but by pagans. See Sozomen, *HE* 5.7, 9, 10; Theodoret, *HE* 3.3. The detail of damage cannot be checked, but is possible.

5 Riot at Alexandria in reign of Julian: Socrates, *HE* 3.2–3; Sozomen, *HE* 5.7. There is no mention of the destruction of a church.

6 Valentinian founded a Gnostic sect at Rome c. AD 160–70 at Rome, which spread over the empire. See K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: the Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. R. McLachlan Wilson, Edinburgh 1983, 317–23.

7 The twelve Roman Olympians: Apollo, Diana, Ceres, Juno, Jupiter, Liber, Mars, Mercury, Minerva, Neptune, Jupiter, Venus, Vulcan. See K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, Munich 1960, 253.

8 The ultimate God of the Valentinians, together with his emanations, constitute thirty aeons (not thirty-two as Ambrose states) according to Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.1 (trans. W. Donaldson, *Irenaeus, Against Heresies*, The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Edinburgh 1868 Vol. 5.1–4). On Valentinians see also Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* (trans. P. Holmes, *Tertullian, against the Valentinians*, The Ante-Nicene Christian Library 15, Edinburgh 1870, 119ff.).

the festival of the Maccabean martyrs,¹ chanting psalms, as was their ancient practice and custom, the monks were angered by such insolence, and set fire to a Valentinian shrine which had been hastily constructed in some country village.

17. How many will take up² this opportunity³ when they remember that in the time of Julian, a man [Capitolinus],⁴ who overturned an altar and disturbed a sacrifice, was condemned to death by a judge and made a martyr? And so the judge who tried him was never held to be anything other than a persecutor. Nobody thought it right to associate with him, or that he deserved a kiss of greeting. But if he were still alive I would fear that you would not be inflicting punishment on him,⁵ though he has not escaped the punishment from heaven, seeing that he outlived his heir.

18. But it is said that the judge was ordered to hold an inquiry, and that he received written instruction that he ought not to have sent a report about the affair, but to have punished it, and that the stolen offerings must be returned.⁶ I will omit other arguments and say only this. In the past basilicas of churches have been burnt by Jews, without any restitution being made. Nothing was demanded, nothing requested. What could a synagogue in a remote fortified settlement in the back of beyond possess, when all there is in the place is inconsiderable, and nothing is of value and little in quantity? Of what then could the fire have robbed the treacherous⁷ Jews? These are the tricks of Jews eager to spread slander, so that an extraordinary inquiry of a military court should be set up, because they are making these complaints, and that a soldier should be sent out – who, emperor, will quite possibly

1 For the martyrdom of the Maccabees see 2 Macc. 7. A Christian cult sprang up, and some time in the fourth century the synagogue at Antioch where the seven brothers and their mothers were supposed to have been buried was taken over by the Christians.

2 *Se offere habent* = *se offerent* (future), see Mohrmann 1965, 31, 57, 119.

3 The opportunity of becoming a martyr by destroying a place of non-Christian worship.

4 *Illum*: this replaces *Capitolinum* of *Ep. ex.* 1a, which Ambrose found to be a mistake. For Jerome, *Chron.* s.a. 363, and Theodoret, *HE* 3.3, show that Capitolinus was the name of the judge, probably the vicar of Thrace, while the martyr was called Aemilianus.

5 Zelzer's text is *Timerem ne in eum tu vindicares*. The logic of the argument requires that Theodosius, who punishes the destroyers of a synagogue and of a temple, would have approved of a judge who had done the same, and therefore *not* punished him. In the translation I assume that *non* has dropped out of the text. But *Ep. ex.* 1a also reads *ne*, and not *ne non*.

6 Ambrose returns to the burning of the synagogue at Callinicum. The judge is presumably still the official previously described as military *comes Orientis*.

7 *Insidiantibus*.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 105

say what he¹ said here some time before your arrival: 'How will Christ be able to help, when we are in the service for the Jews against Christ, when we are sent to exact punishment on behalf of the Jews [when we are sent for the Jews against Christ, when we are in the service to exact punishment on behalf of the Jews]?² They have lost their own armies, they wish to destroy ours'.

19. What other slanders will they not zealously take up, these people who have defamed Christ himself with false evidence? What other slanders will they not zealously embark upon, these men who lie even in matters relating to God? Whom will they not accuse of being instigators of this disturbance? Whom will they not inform against even though they do not know them at all, so that they can witness innumerable files of chained members of the Christian community, see the necks of the faithful people yoked in captivity, so that the servants of God are buried in darkness, smitten with axes, delivered to the flames, or sent to the mines, so that their punishment should not be brief.³

20. Will you give the Jews this triumph over the Church of God? This trophy at the expense of the community of Christ? This rejoicing, emperor, to the faithless? This celebration to the synagogue? This grief to the Church? The Jewish people will enter this feast-day into their calendar, and will assuredly rank it with the days on which they triumphed over the Amorites,⁴ or over the Canaanites,⁵ or over Pharaoh, the king of Egypt,⁶ or that on which they succeeded in freeing themselves from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.⁷ They will now add this festival, signifying that they have celebrated a triumph over the people of Christ.

21. And although they deny that they are bound by the laws of the Romans to the point that they think the laws criminal, they now think that they have a right to be avenged as it were on the basis of Roman laws. Where were those laws when they set fire to the roofs of holy basilicas? If Julian did not avenge the Church because he was an apostate, are you, emperor, going to avenge damage done to a synagogue because you are a Christian?

1 Ambrose must be alluding to a particular Christian officer.

2 The version of *Ep. ex. 1a* is in brackets.

3 This and the following is pure rhetoric.

4 Num. 21.21–31

5 Num. 21.1–3

6 Ex. 14.

7 2 Chron. 36; Ezra 1.1.

22. And what will Christ say to you after this? Do you not remember the instructions he gave to the holy king David through Nathan the prophet?¹ 'I chose you though you were younger than your brothers, promoted you from private citizen to be emperor. I have placed an offspring of your seed on the imperial throne. I have made barbarian peoples subject to you. I have given you peace. I have brought your enemy into your power, as your captive. You did not have corn to feed your army. I threw open the enemy's gates to you, and I opened their granaries by their own hands.² Your enemies gave you their own provisions, which they had prepared for themselves. I so confused the plans of your enemy, that he laid himself open to attack. I tied up the usurper himself,³ and I fettered his mind so that when he still had an opportunity to flee, he shut himself in together with all his forces, as if he was afraid that any individual might escape you.⁴ The usurper's commander⁵ and his force, which was afloat on nature's other element, and which I had previously dispersed so that it might not become part of a combined military force, I brought together to make your victory complete. I instructed your army, assembled as it was from many invincible peoples, to observe loyalty, calm and concord as if they were all of one race. And when there was the utmost danger that the treacherous strategy of the barbarians would break through the Alps, I granted you victory within the barrier of the Alps so that you were victorious without great loss.⁶ I therefore enabled you to triumph over your enemy, and yet you give my enemies a triumph over my people!'

23. Surely Maximus was abandoned precisely because, just before setting out on the campaign, when he heard that a synagogue had been burnt at

1 2 Sam. 12.7–9. Ambrose points out that the instructions he is about to give to Theodosius are closely parallel those given by Nathan to David.

2 The granaries of Siscia fed Theodosius' armies after Maximus had been defeated in a battle nearby. On the campaign: Pacatus, *Panegyric* 30–38; Zos. 4.45–46.

3 A reference to invasions of Gaul by Franks and Saxons which delayed Maximus' operations against Theodosius.

4 Maximus remained at Aquileia, and after the defeats suffered by his army in Pannonia surrendered to Theodosius.

5 Andragathius, Maximus' *magister militum* and *comes*, left his army leaderless at Siscia, in order to assemble and take command of Maximus' fleet, aiming to sail against the eastern fleet reportedly on its way to Italy. He missed it, and committed suicide on news of Maximus' defeat and death. See *PLRE* 1.62–63 s.v. Andragathius 3.

6 Neither of the two decisive battles, the first on the river Savus near Siscia, the second near Poetovio on the Dravus, was fought within the Alps, but in the first Theodosius suffered remarkably low losses.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 107

Rome he sent an edict to Rome as if to uphold public order? Thereupon the Christian community said: 'This man will come to no good. That king has become a Jew. We have heard that the fellow [claims to be] a defender of public order.¹ Christ, who died for sinners, will soon put him to the test.'² If this is what people said about his words,³ what will they say about his punishment? For straight away he was defeated by the Franks, by the Saxon tribe, in Sicily,⁴ at Siscia, at Poetovio, in fact all over the world. What does a pious man have in common with an infidel?⁵ When the impious man is destroyed, the unholy precedents⁶ set by him must be destroyed too. What damaged and caused the defeated man to founder, the victor must not imitate, but condemn.

24. And so I have gone over these favours to you, not because I think you ungrateful, but because I think that they were granted to you deservedly, so that with this reminder you, to whom more has been, given should love more. When Simon answered with these words,⁷ the Lord Jesus said: '*You have judged rightly*'. And straight away, turning to the woman who had anointed his feet, so foreshadowing the Church, he said to Simon: '*Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven less, loves less*'. This is the woman who entered the house of a Pharisee, cast off the Jew, and gained Christ. Seeing that the Church has shut out the Synagogue, why is another attempt being made to allow the Synagogue to shut out the Church, in the person of a servant of Christ, from the bosom of faith, from the house of Christ?

25. Love and devotion for you have moved me to assemble these topics in my letter to you. I am so much in your debt for the favours you have granted me, seeing that at my request you have freed large numbers of people from exile, from prison, from the ultimate penalty of death, that I must not be afraid even to risk offending you, when it is your safety which is at stake.⁸ Nobody speaks out more confidently than he who loves sincerely. Nobody, at any

1 *Defensor disciplinae*.

2 I have translated *probabit* instead of Zelzer's *probavit*.

3 *De sermone*, i.e. the words of the edict.

4 By a naval force led by Valentinian II.

5 *Perfido, perfidus*, 'faithless', is Ambrose's favourite epithet for the Jews.

6 *Exempla*.

7 Lk. 7.42: 'Which of them will love him more? Simon answered: "The one, I suppose, whom he forgave more."' The lesson is expounded in greater detail in *Ep. ex.* 1.5.

8 *Pro salute tua: salus* covers safety, health and salvation.

rate ought to injure somebody who has his¹ interest at heart. I need not therefore fear to lose in one moment the favour, which every bishop must have, and which I have enjoyed for many years. Nevertheless I am not pleading to avert the loss of your favour, but the danger to your salvation.

26. Does it really, emperor, matter so much if you should decide that something need not be investigated and punished, which until this day nobody has investigated or ever punished? It is a serious matter to put your faith at risk for the sake of the Jews. When Gideon had killed the consecrated calf, the gentiles said: 'Let the gods punish the wrong done to themselves'.² Who will avenge³ a synagogue? Christ whom they killed, whom they rejected? Or will God the Father avenge a people who do not acknowledge the Father, because they do not acknowledge the Son? Who will exact vengeance on behalf of the heresy of the Valentinians? How can your Piety [can you of all people]⁴ take vengeance on their behalf seeing that you have ordered that they are to be excluded,⁵ and not to enjoy freedom of assembly? If I cite to you in evidence the case of king Josiah, a king approved by God, are you going to condemn activities performed by these people,⁶ which in the case of Josiah were approved by God?⁷

27. At any rate, if I do not inspire sufficient confidence, give orders to attend to those whom you judge to be genuine bishops: let there be a discussion, emperor, of what ought to be done, without damage to the faith. If over matters of finance you consult your *comites*,⁸ how much more appropriate is it that in a matter of religion you consult the priests of the Lord?

28. Your Clemency must consider how many are seeking to ambush the Church, how many are out to find her weak spots. If they find a slight chink, they will drive a pointed weapon through it. I speak after the manner of men.

1 I have translated *sibi* as referring to *nemo*, not to the subject of *consulit*. Ambrose has Theodosius' interest at heart, and therefore Theodosius ought not to injure him.

2 See Jg. 6.28–31, but the formulation of the Gentiles' reply echoes a principle of the traditional state religion: *Deorum iniurias dis cura* (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.73).

3 *Habet vindicare = vindicabit*, cf. Mohrmann 1965, 31, 57, 119.

4 The phrase in brackets represents the (corrupt) version of *Ep. ex.* 1a.

5 The Valentinians were forbidden from meeting by *CTh* 16.5.65.2 which is much later. But Ambrose may have thought (or hoped) that they were included under *CTh* 16.5.12 of 383 or 16.5.14 of 388 which take away the right to assemble from all 'heretical sects'.

6 The bishop and monks of Callinicum.

7 2 Kg. 22–23: Josiah purges his kingdom of all traces of polytheistic worship.

8 The two principal financial officials, the *comes rei privatae* and the *comes sacrarum largitionum*.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 109

But God is to be feared more greatly than all men. He of right is to be preferred even to emperors. If anybody thinks that deference should be shown to a friend, to a parent, or to a relative, then I too have been right to judge that deference is to be shown to God, and that he is to be preferred to all men. Consult your own interest, emperor, or at any rate allow me to consult my own.

29. What will I be able to say hereafter, if it becomes known that in obedience to orders issued on this occasion, Christians have been slain, either by the sword, or with cudgels or with whips loaded with lead.¹ How will I justify this deed? What excuses will I make to the bishops who bitterly complain that certain priests who have performed the duties of their rank for thirty or countless more years, and indeed other servants of the Church, are dragged away from their sacred office and enrolled in a civic council?² For if the men who serve you in the forces are to be kept in the service only for a definite period of time, how much more consideration ought you to show to those who serve God?³ How, I say, can I justify this to the bishops, who complain on behalf of the clergy and write that the churches are being laid waste by grievous burdens.

30. I wished this issue⁴ to be brought to the notice of your Clemency. Over this issue you will deign to deliberate and make a ruling⁵ according to your judgement. But that decree, which distresses and rightly distresses me, cancel

1 Such beatings might be employed to extort information in the course of a criminal investigation, such as one into alleged arson.

2 Here Ambrose introduces an ecclesiastical grievance, which seems to have no direct connection with the burning of the synagogue. The priesthood was used by decurions to evade their hereditary curial duties. From time to time emperors legislated that the priesthood did not confer immunity from such duties, or that decurions were not eligible to become priests. In *Ep.* 73.14 Ambrose states that if men of curial descent became priests they were obliged to renounce their inheritance. Decurions who were ordained in contravention of the law were liable to be returned to their councils. Ambrose is suggesting that this is just as impious as punishing Christians for burning a synagogue. Leppin 2003, 141, suggests that Theodosius had ordered clerics at Callinicum to be returned to their curia as a punishment.

3 I think the idea is that the emperor shows consideration for his soldiers by setting a limit to their length of service. He is asked to show the same consideration to decurions who chose to be ordained by setting a limit to (or even cancelling) their duty to serve in the council, if they choose to be ordained. As in other passages Ambrose has omitted a stage in his argument for sake of brevity.

4 I.e. the practice of recalling clerics to their *curiae*.

5 In *Ep. ex.* 1a the two verbs 'deliberate' and 'make a ruling' are in the imperative, instead of infinitives depending on 'you will deign'.

it and throw it out! Whatever you have ordered to be done counts as your action. And in case the *comes*¹ does not do it, I should prefer that you were more merciful, rather than that he had not carried out his orders [what you have ordered].²

31. Here are persons³ in your treatment of whom you still need to invite and earn the mercy of the Lord God towards the Roman Empire. Here are persons for whom you must have greater concern than you have for yourself. May their gratitude and their safety be brought home to you by this speech. I fear that you will hand the decision of your case⁴ to the whim of somebody else. But so far everything remains entirely in your hands. I pledge myself on your behalf to our God on this point. And you are not to be afraid because of your oath.⁵ Surely no change of purpose that has been made out of respect for him can displease God? You will not in any case change anything in that letter – whether it has actually been sent or not yet sent.⁶ Give orders for another to be dictated, which is to be full of faith, full of piety. It is in your power to change your mind, it is not in mine to conceal the truth

32. You have pardoned the people of Antioch for the wrong they have done you.⁷ You have recalled the daughters of your enemy and have given them to a relative to bring up. You have sent the mother of your enemy an allowance from your treasury.⁸ So outstanding a display of piety as this and such faith in God will be eclipsed by your present act. [You have spared

1 The *comes Orientis*.

2 I think that this sentence shows that Ambrose is more concerned with the principle of the thing than with what precisely happens at Callinicum. He knows perfectly well that to interfere from so far away in the official on the spot's handling of such an affair is both foolish – at least 'speaking after the manner of man' – and unenforceable.

3 The argument is that by pardoning the persons who have destroyed the synagogue he will gain divine support for the Roman Empire, and will be fulfilling his duty as a ruler to the people who are his subjects.

4 That is, whether he will continue to enjoy divine support will depend on whether the *comes* disobeys his orders or not.

5 Evidently Theodosius was known to have sworn an oath that he would punish the arsonists at Callinicum, though this is the first time we are told about it.

6 Evidently Ambrose has not been officially informed.

7 Theodosius had pardoned Antioch after the imperial images had been overturned in a riot in 387. See John Chrysostom, *Or. 21 ad populum Antiochenum* (PG 49, 211ff.), translated by members of the English Church in *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the Statues*, A Library of the Fathers, London 1893, 347–64.

8 Nothing else is known about the usurper Maximus' mother and daughters. His son Victor was executed.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 111

armed foes, you have saved the lives of your personal enemies: I beg you therefore, do not think that you must show such enthusiasm to inflict punishment on Christians.

33. And now, emperor, I ask you, do not treat me with contempt: I am, after all, motivated by fear for you, and also for myself. It is the voice of a holy man that cries: *Why was I born to see the distress of my people?*¹ Was it so that I should provoke the wrath of God? I for my part have done all I could, while showing due respect, to get you to hear me in the palace, so that it might not become necessary for you to hear me in church.]²

APPENDIX
EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 1 (MAUR. 41) TO
AMBROSE'S SISTER MARCELLINA (388/389)

Introduction

The present letter is addressed to Ambrose's sister Marcellina, and was sent to her together with a copy of the letter to Theodosius (*Ep. ex. 1a*). It describes the last episode in the affair. Most of it is taken up with the text of a church sermon that Ambrose had delivered in the presence of the emperor, which gradually leads up to the demand that Theodosius is to pardon the accused. After he had finished the sermon, and when he was about to give communion, Ambrose came down from his pulpit and addressed the emperor privately, or at least not in the hearing of the whole congregation, and told him that he would not receive communion unless he promised to pardon the men. Theodosius gave the promise, and duly received communion.

The letter reads as if it was originally intended to make a pair with *Ep. 74* in the *Collection*, as it does with *Ep. ex. 1a* of the letters *extra collectionem*. But it would seem that in the end for some reason Ambrose chose not to include it. We can only speculate what the reason was. Perhaps Ambrose felt that much of its argument would simply duplicate contents of *Ep. 74*. It could

1 1 Macc. 2.7. Ambrose evokes the memory of Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees, mourning the persecution of the Jewish religion, and refusing to obey the order to perform a sacrifice contrary to Jewish law.

2 The last sentence of c. 32 and the whole of c. 33, which are bracketed, were not in the original version of the letter, transmitted outside the *Collection*. They were presumably added by Ambrose when he edited the *Collection*. It would have been extremely undiplomatic, to say the least, to end a petition which was addressed to the emperor personally with a threat.

also be that he thought publication of the letter's conclusion, with its account of a dramatic triumph of the bishop over the emperor was politically unwise, or even that he had dramatised the episode more than was strictly accurate.

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 1
(MAUR. 41) TO AMBROSE'S SISTER MARCELLINA (388/389)**

Brother to sister.¹

1. You have kindly² written to me, holy sister,³ that you were still worrying for me, because I wrote that I was worried. This makes me wonder whether you have not received the letters in which I wrote that my peace of mind had returned. For after it was reported that a Jewish synagogue had been burnt by Christians at the instigation of a bishop, as had a meeting-place of the Valentinians,⁴ the order went out during my absence at Aquileia,⁵ that the synagogue must be rebuilt by the bishop, and the monks who had burnt the meeting-place of the Valentinians punished. Then since several initiatives of mine had met with little success, I composed a letter to the emperor which I am sending to you at the same time as this one,⁶ and when the emperor came to church I delivered the following sermon:

2. In a book of a prophet it is written: *Take to yourself the rod of an almond tree.*⁷ We need to consider what the prophet of the Lord meant when he said this. For it has not been written lightly, since we read in the Pentateuch too that the almond rod of Aaron the priest budded after being laid up for a long time. For it seems to mean that the counsel of a prophet or of a priest ought to be frank, so that it urges what is useful rather than what is pleasing.

1 Marcellina, a consecrated virgin at Rome, cf. above p. 6.

2 *Dignata es*.

3 *Sanctitatem tuam* as translated in Wood and Walford 1881. The address (like *dignata es*) seems extraordinarily formal.

4 Followers of the Gnostic teacher Valentinian who lived at Rome in the reign of Antoninus Pius (Eusebius, *HE* 4.10–11), see also above p. 103.

5 Perhaps for the consecration of the new bishop Chromatius, whose predecessor had died on 26 November 388.

6 *Simul misi*: I have translated it as Zelzer understands the phrase. But Wood and Walford 1881 translate: 'I wrote and dispatched'.

7 Jer. 1.11. But Vulg. has *virgam vigilantem video*. RSV reads 'I see a rod of almond', which is based on the Hebrew *shaqed. Sume*, 'take up', is in neither the Vulgate nor the English version.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 113

3. The reason why the prophet is ordered to take up a rod of almond is that the fruit of that tree is bitter in the rind, hard in the shell, juicy within,¹ so that in like manner the prophet should display a bitter and hard exterior and not be afraid to proclaim harsh truths. Similarly the priest: although his advice for a time seems bitter to some, and like the rod of Aaron is laid up for a long time in the ears of people who pretend not to have heard, nevertheless some time, when it is thought to have withered, it bursts into bud.

4. That is why the apostle also said: *What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*² He mentioned the rod first, and he has indeed struck the erring as with a rod of almond, but only so that later he can comfort them in a spirit of gentleness. In the same way gentleness restores a man whom the rod has barred from the heavenly sacraments. He also gave the following advice to a disciple: *Charge, beseech, rebuke!*³ He uses two harsh terms and a gentle one. But he only uses the harsh terms so that he might soften them. For as the bitterness of food or drink grows sweet, and on the other hand the sweetness of food grows bitter to bodies sick with overabundance of bile, so the wounded soul sickens when courted by pleasurable flattery and is again restored by the bitterness of correction.

5. These thoughts have been gathered from the reading from the prophets.⁴ Let us consider what the lesson from the Gospel has to say to us: *One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat⁵ at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learnt that she was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who, and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.'* And Jesus answering said to him: *'Simon, I have something to say to you.'* And he answered: *'What is it, teacher?'* *'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay he forgave them both.'*

1 For the interpretation of Aaron's rod see Philo, *Vit. Moys.* 2.178–83, on Num. 17.8.

2 1 Cor. 4.21.

3 2 Tim. 4.2.

4 This suggests that Jer. 1 has been read at this service.

5 Literally 'reclined', as Romans did at meals.

Now which of them loves him more?' Simon answered: 'The one, I suppose, whom he forgave more.' And he said to him: 'You have judged rightly.' Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon: 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time that I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little.' And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?' And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you: Go in peace.'¹ How simple in language, how profound in counsel, this reading from the Gospel is. Therefore, because they are the words of the great counsellor, let us consider how deep they are.

6. Our Lord Jesus Christ judged that men could be obliged and motivated to do what is right more effectively by benefits, than by terror, and that love is a more effective instrument of correction than fear. And for that reason, when he was coming into the world through a virgin giving birth, he sent ahead his grace, so that he could forgive sins in baptism, and thereby make men feel gratitude to himself.² Thus, if we offer to Jesus the acts of thanksgiving that we owe him, all will be rewarded by grace itself, as Jesus has shown through the example of this woman.³ For if Jesus had remitted only our first debts, he would have appeared stingy, rather than generous, more intent on correcting rather than magnanimous to reward. The cunning of offering no more than an incentive befits a small mind. But for God it is right that when he has encouraged men by an act of grace, he should lead them forward by further acts of grace. That is why he first presents us with baptism, and if we serve him well rewards us more abundantly. And so the benefits of Christ are an incentive to virtue, and also its reward.

¹ Lk. 7.36–50. This reading is also commented on in the letter to Theodosius, evidence that when Ambrose wrote to the emperor, he had already decided the reading to be used at this service.

² Is this an allusion to 'the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mk 1.4) offered by John the Baptist?

³ If men show gratitude for the grace of baptism through good deeds, God will reward the deeds with further acts of grace, i.e. forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 115

7. But nobody is to be shocked by the use of the word, 'creditor'.¹ Previously we were subject to a hard usurer who could only be satisfied and fully paid by the death of the debtor. The Lord Jesus came. He saw us bound by a heavy debt. Nobody could pay his interest out of his inheritance of innocence. I was unable to have what I needed to free me out of my own resources. He offered me a new kind of acquittal. As I did not have the means to pay the usury, I was to change my creditor. Now guilt, not nature, made us debtors. For it was through our sins that we contracted a heavy burden of debt, so that we are now in bonds, who used to be free. For a debtor is somebody who has received something from the wealth of a creditor. But sin belongs to the devil. That wicked wealth is, as it were, part of his inheritance. As the virtues are the riches of Christ, so crimes are the wealth of the devil. He had reduced the human race to an everlasting captivity as a result of the heavy burden of interest on a mortgaged inheritance, which the debt-burdened father of the race had passed on to his descendants as an encumbered legacy. Then the lord Jesus came. He offered his own death for the death of all. He poured out his blood, for the blood of all men.

8. We have therefore changed our creditor, we have not evaded him altogether, or rather we have in a sense escaped, for the debt remains, but the interest has been cancelled. For the Lord said *to those in chains*, '*Come forth*,' and to those in prison: '*Appear, your sins have been discharged*.'² He has therefore discharged them for all, and there is nobody to whom he has not brought alleviation. For so it is written that he has *forgiven us all our trespasses, having destroyed the bond of the decree which stood against us*.³ Why then do we hold on to the bonds of others, and wish to exact debts from others, when we have obtained a remission of our own? He who forgives all demands from all that whatever anyone remembers to have been remitted to himself, he must remit to others.

9. Make sure that you do not get yourself into a worse case as a creditor than as a debtor, like the man in the Gospel to whom his lord forgave the whole of his debt, and who subsequently proceeded to exact from a fellow slave what he himself had not paid.⁴ Thereupon his lord was angry, and exacted from him with extreme harshness, what he had previously remitted.

1 Ambrose proceeds to expound the parable of the creditor of Lk. 7.41 from a new point of view.

2 Is. 49.9. But the Vulgate as well as the RSV have 'darkness' instead of 'prison'.

3 Col. 2.13.

4 Mt. 18.24–35.

Let us therefore take care that this does not happen to us, that through not remitting what is owed to us, we find ourselves in the position of having to pay what had been forgiven us. For so it is written in the words of Jesus: *So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.*¹ Let us therefore who have been forgiven much, forgive a little, and let us understand that the more we forgive, the more acceptable we will be to God, because we become more grateful to God the more he has forgiven us.²

10. Finally, when asked, *'Which of them loves him more?'* the Pharisee replied: *'The one, I suppose, whom he forgave more.'* To whom the Lord replied: *'You have judged rightly.'* The Pharisee's judgement is praised but his allegiance criticised. He judges well about others, but what he approves in others, he does not believe himself. You hear a Jew praising the discipline of the Church, declaring it to possess true grace, and honouring the bishops of the Church. You call on him to believe. But he refuses to follow what he praises in us. Therefore the praise he heard from the lord was qualified: *'You have judged rightly.'* For Cain too made his offering *rightly*,³ but he did not divide *rightly*. And the Lord therefore said to him: *'If you offer rightly, but do not divide rightly, you have sinned. Keep quiet.'* So the Pharisee too offered rightly, because he judged that Christ ought to be loved more deeply by Christians because he forgave us many sins. But he did not divide rightly, because he thought that he who remits men their sins could be ignorant of any sins of men.

11. That is why he said to Simon: *'Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears.'* We are all of us the one body of Christ, of which God is the head, and we the limbs.⁴ Perhaps some people are the eyes, the prophets for instance; others the teeth, for instance the apostles by whom the nourishment of the gospel is fed into our hearts. Of these it is rightly written: *His*

¹ Mt. 18.35.

² But Wood and Alford 1881, and Beyenka, translate *gratiores deo sumus* as 'we are more pleasing (acceptable) to God'.

³ Gen. 4.7; the distinction between 'offering rightly' and 'dividing rightly' is in the Septuagint but neither in the Vulgate nor RSV. Philo explains that Abel offered his first-born without any delay, while Cain delayed and kept the first for himself. See Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, translated from the Armenian by R. Marcus, Loeb Classical Library edition of Philo, Supplement, Cambridge MA/London 1979, 88–89 (cc. 62 and 64).

⁴ 1 Cor. 12.12.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 117

*eyes shall be cheerful with wine and his teeth whiter than milk.*¹ His hands are they who perform good works, and they who dispense the strength of nourishment to the poor are his stomach. There also are some who are his feet. Would that I was good enough to be his heel! So he who pardons the offences of the very meanest human beings, pours water on the feet of Christ. In setting free the humble, he washes the feet of Christ.

12. He also pours water on the feet of Christ, who cleanses his own conscience from the pollution of sin. For Christ walks in the breast of each one of us. Therefore beware, in case you have a polluted conscience, and begin to defile the feet of Christ. Beware that within you he does not tread on a thorn of sin, which might wound his heel as he walks inside you. This is why the Pharisee did not pour water on to the feet of Christ: he did not have a mind clean of the pollution of faithlessness. Where after all could a man find the means to wash his conscience, when he had refused the water of Christ.² But the Church has water and it has tears, the water of baptism and the tears of penance. For faith, which weeps over old sins, acquires the habit of avoiding new ones. So Simon the Pharisee who did not have the water, assuredly also did not have tears. For how could he have tears, if he did not do penance. As he did not believe in Christ, he did not have tears. For if he had had them, he would have washed his eyes to see Christ, whom, though he was reclining next to him, he did not see. For if he had seen, him he would assuredly not have doubted his power.

13. The Pharisee did not have hair, in that he could not recognise the Nazarite, the Church had hair in that she sought for the Nazarite. Hair is considered a superfluous part of the body, but when anointed it gives out a pleasing scent, and is an ornament to the head, yet unless anointed with oil it is a burden. The same is true of riches. They are a burden if you do not know how to use them, if you do not sprinkle them with the odour of Christ. But if you feed the poor, wash their wounds, wipe away their filth, then assuredly you are wiping the feet of Christ.

14. *You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.* The kiss is assuredly the sign of love. Where then could the Jew have found a kiss, when he did not recognise peace, when he refused peace as Christ said: *'Peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you.'* The Synagogue does not have the kiss, the Church has it, the Church, which has

1 Gen. 49.12. The epithet for the eyes in Vulg. is *pulchriores*/more beautiful, in RSV, 'red'.

2 Baptism.

waited, the Church, which has loved, and has said: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*¹ For it was the ardour of her drawn-out longing, intensified with waiting for the Lord's coming, that she wished to quench drop by drop with his kiss, to satisfy her thirst by this present. For that reason, the holy one says: *I have opened my lips, and I have declared your praise.*² Who therefore praises the lord Jesus, kisses him, and who praises assuredly believes. Finally, David himself says: *I have believed and therefore I have spoken,*³ and earlier: *Let my mouth be filled with your praise so that I may sing of your glory.*⁴

15. Concerning the granting of heavenly grace the same scripture teaches you that he who receives the Spirit kisses Christ, in the words of the holy one: *I opened my mouth and drew in the spirit.*⁵ Therefore he who confesses Jesus, kisses him. *For man believes in his heart for the sake of justice, and he confesses with his lips for salvation.*⁶ So the feet of Jesus are kissed by anyone who when reading the gospel recognises the deeds of Jesus, and admires them with pious affection; and with a reverent kiss as it were caresses the footsteps of the lord as he walks about. Let us kiss Jesus therefore with the communion of a kiss. *Let him who reads, understand.*⁷

16. But how can a Jew have this kiss, who neither believes in Jesus' coming, nor in his passion? For how can he believe that somebody has suffered whom he does not believe to have come? The Pharisee therefore did not have the kiss, except perhaps the kiss of the traitor, Judas. But Judas did not have the kiss either, that is why as he was about to show the Jews the pre-arranged signal of betrayal, the Lord said to him: '*Judas do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*'⁸ That is: You are offering me a kiss, though you lack the love that belongs to the kiss; you offer me a kiss though you are ignorant of the right observance of the kiss.⁹ A kiss of the lips is not what is required but a kiss of the heart and the mind.

1 S. of S. 1.1.

2 Ps. 51.15 (Vulg. 52.17) but the verbs are in the future.

3 Vulg. Ps. 115.10; RSV 116.10: 'I kept my faith, even when I said ...'

4 Vulg. Ps. 70.8; RSV 71.8: 'My mouth is filled with thy praise, and with thy glory all the day'.

5 Vulg. Ps. 118.131, but RSV 119.131: 'with open mouth I pant/because I long for thy commandments'.

6 Rom. 10.10.

7 Mt. 24.15.

8 Lk. 22.48.

9 *Osculi sacramentum.*

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 119

17. You object: 'But he did kiss the Lord'. Yes, he kissed him with the lips: that kind of kiss the Jewish people have; and that is why it was said: *This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*¹ It follows that he who is without faith, and without love² does not have the kiss. For the kiss serves to imprint the force of love.³ Where there is no love,⁴ where there is no faith, no liking,⁵ how can there be the sweetness of kissing?

18. But the Church does not cease to kiss the feet of Christ, and for that reason she demands not one, but many kisses, in the Song of Songs.⁶ For she, like holy Mary, is attentive to all his teaching, listens to all his words when the gospel is read or the prophet, and she keeps all his sayings in her heart.⁷ It follows that the Church alone has kisses, being in the position of a bride. For the kiss is pledge of marriage, the privilege of wedlock. How can a Jew have the kiss, who does not believe in the bridegroom? How can a Jew have the kiss, who does not know that the bridegroom has come?

19. Not only does he not have any kisses, he does not have any oil with which to anoint the feet of Christ either, for if he had, he would have by now have softened his own neck. In the words of Moses: *It is a stiff-necked people.*⁸ And the Lord said that the Levite and the priest passed by on the other side, without either of them pouring oil or wine on the wounds of the man beaten by robbers.⁹ They had nothing to pour, for had they had any oil they would have poured it also on their own wounds. As Isaiah cries: *They have no poultice to apply, no oil, no bandage.*¹⁰

20. But the Church has oil, with which she treats the wounds of her people. To prevent the stiffness of their wounds becoming deeply engrained, she has oil, which she received secretly. With that oil Asher washed his foot, as it is written: *a blessed son is Asher, and he will be acceptable to his brothers, and he will dip his foot in oil.*¹¹ With this oil therefore the Church anoints

1 Mt. 15.8 echoing Is. 29.13.

2 *Caritas*.

3 *Amor*.

4 *Caritas*.

5 *Dilectio*, *Caritas*, *amor*, *dilectio* appear to be used synonymously, cf. J. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, London 1947.

6 S. of S.1.1.

7 Like the Virgin Mary in Lk. 2.51.

8 Ex. 34.9.

9 Lk. 10.31ff.

10 Is. 1.6.

11 Deut. 33.24.

the necks of her sons so that they can take up the yoke of Christ. With this oil she has anointed the martyrs to wipe them clean of the dust of the world. With this oil she has anointed the confessors to ensure that they do not give up their labour, or fall down from weariness, or are defeated by the tides of this world. It is in order that they should be revived by the oil of the spirit that she has anointed them.

21. The Synagogue does not have this oil, for she does not have the olive, for she did not understand the significance of the dove, which brought the twig of olive after the deluge.¹ For that dove descended on a later occasion, when Christ was being baptised, and it remained on him as John witnesses in the gospel, saying: *I saw the spirit descending as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.*² How could he have seen the dove, who did not see him on to whom the Spirit descended as a dove?

22. So the Church washes the feet of Christ, and wipes them with her hair, and anoints them with oil, and drenches them with perfume, because she not only looks after the wounded, and sustains the weary, but she also sprinkles over them the sweet perfume of grace; and it is not only on the rich and the powerful that she sheds this grace, but also on men of plebeian origin. She weighs all in an equal balance, receives all in the same bosom, sustains all in the same lap.

23. Christ died once and was buried once and desires ointment to be poured on his feet every day. On what feet are we then to pour it? The feet of Christ are those of whom he says: *As you did to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me.*³ These are the feet, which that woman in the gospel refreshes,⁴ which she washes with her tears, whenever sin is forgiven to the lowest of men, when their fault is washed away, their pardon granted. He kisses these feet who loves the humblest of God's people.⁵ He anoints these feet with ointment, who grants the grace of his leniency even to the most lowly. In these the martyrs, in these the apostles, in these the lord Jesus himself declares that he is honoured.

24. You see how virtuous the Lord is. He challenges you to piety by his own example. He is virtuous even when he is scolding. Accusing the Jews he says: *O, my people, what have I done to you? In what way have I wearied*

1 Gen. 8.11.

2 Jn 1.32.

3 Mt. 25.40.

4 *Refrigerat.*

5 *Plebis sacrae.*

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 121

*you? Answer me! For I have brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Remember what Balak devised for you,¹ that is the man who called on the aid of the magical arts.² Nevertheless I did not allow him to injure you. Surely you were oppressed while in exile in a foreign land, you were burdened with heavy wrongs. I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and he who had spoiled a stranger was himself despoiled. You who had lost your own possessions gained those of others.³ Having been delivered from the enemies who were besieging, you watched in safety, in the midst of the waters, the ruin of your enemies, when the very wave, which had flowed around you and carried you forward, flowed back again and submerged your foes.⁴ When as you were coming through the desert you grew short of food, did I not furnish you a rain of nourishment, and abundant supplies wherever you went?⁵ Did I not overcome all your enemies and lead you into the land of Botrys.⁶ Did I not hand over to you alive King Seon of the Amorites,⁷ the arrogant leader of the men who provoked you, whom you condemned in accordance with an ancient curse, and tied to a plank, and raised on a cross.⁸ What need to mention the armies of the five kings who sought to deny you the lands that were promised to you?⁹ And in return for all these benefits what is required of you *but to judge fairly and to deal justly and to love mercy and to be ready to walk with the Lord your God*.¹⁰*

25. And what was the reproach which God addressed to King David himself, that pious and mild man, through Nathan the prophet?¹¹ 'I chose you the youngest of your brothers. I filled you with a spirit of mildness. Through Samuel, in whom was my spirit and my name, I anointed you king. From being an exile I made you a conqueror, deposing the previous king of

1 Mic. 6.3–5.

2 Num. 22.1–25 tells the story.

3 Ex. 13.36.

4 Ex. 15.19–25.

5 Ex. 16.4.

6 That is, the Valley of Eshcol, the 'valley of clusters of grapes', see Num. 13.24.

7 Num. 22.21–29. But Seon was killed in battle; Ambrose has confused him with the king of Ai.

8 Jos. 8.23–29, but the crucified king was ruler of Ai, not of Botrys.

9 Jos. 10.3–27.

10 Mic. 6.8: The RSV: 'what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God'.

11 The following is based on 2 Sam. 12.7–10, but not a citation.

your territory, who was being driven by an evil spirit to persecute the priests of the Lord.¹ On your throne I sat one of your seed, to be not so much an heir as a colleague. I made aliens subject to you, so that they who previously attacked you are serving you. And now are you going to deliver my servants into the hand of their enemies, and to take away what belonged to a servant of mine, as a result of which you will brand yourself with sin, and give a triumph to my adversaries?²

26. And so, emperor, for I will not only speak about you but to you, since you are aware how serious a confrontation with God is likely to be, know that the more glorious your position becomes the greater deference you must show to your maker. For it is written: When the Lord will lead you into a foreign land, and you eat produce that is not your own, you must not say: 'My courage and my justice have given me this', but 'the Lord God has granted it',³ but 'Christ in his mercy has conferred it'. And for that reason in loving his body, that is the Church, fetch water for his feet, kiss his feet, so that you not only pardon those who have been caught in sins,⁴ but by granting them your peace, restore them to concord and peace of mind.⁵ Put ointment on his feet, so that the whole house in which Jesus reclines is filled with the odour of your ointment, and that all reclining with him are made glad by your perfume. This is what he does who honours the most abject, whose acquittal will make the angels glad, as *over one sinner who repents*,⁶ the apostles rejoice, the prophets take delight. *For the eyes cannot say to the hand I have no need of your help, nor again the head to the feet I have no need of you.*⁷ Therefore, because all the limbs are needed, protect the whole body of the Lord Jesus, so that he in turn may condescend to guard your kingdom.

27. When I descended from the pulpit he said to me: 'You have been preaching about me'. I replied: 'I treated a topic relevant to your welfare.' Then he said: 'In the matter of the repairing of the synagogue by the bishop I really did make rather a harsh decision. But it has been put right. The monks commit many crimes.' Then Timasius the master of the cavalry and

1 Cf. 1 Sam. 22.16.

2 Ambrose has tacitly moved from Nathan's reproach of David to his own of Theodosius.

3 Based on Deut. 9.4.

4 These are the monks who have burnt the synagogue, and whom Ambrose wishes to be pardoned.

5 The pardoned monks will regain the calm needed for their religious life.

6 Lk. 15.10.

7 1. Cor. 12.21.

DESTRUCTION OF THE SYNAGOGUE AT CALLINICUM 123

infantry¹ began to be very abusive about the monks. I replied to him: 'I am dealing with the emperor as is right because I know that he fears the Lord. With you, who talk so rudely, I will have to deal differently.'

28. When I had stood inactive for some time, I said to the emperor: 'Enable me to make the offering on your behalf without worry. Set my mind at rest.' As he remained seated without making an open promise, and I continued to stand, he said that he would put it right. Straightaway I insisted that he must cancel the whole investigation, so that the *comes* might not in the course of the investigation inflict some wrong on Christians. He promised that this would happen. I say to him: 'I am acting on your promise,' and I repeated: 'I am acting on your promise.' Then he said: 'Act.' So I proceeded to the altar, as I would not have proceeded if he had not made me a full promise. And the offering was received with such grace that I sensed that it had been particularly agreeable to our God, and that we were in the divine presence.² So all was done as I wished.

1 *PLRE* 1.914–15, s.v. Flavius Timasius.

2 Ambrose reports a sense of contact with the supernatural also in *Ep.* 77.1 (Maur. 22) and *Ep.* 51.2 (Maur.15).

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA AT MILAN IN 385–6

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULAE* 75, 75A, 76 AND 77

The conflict between the bishop of Milan and the Arian (*Homoian*) court in the years 385–6, in which Ambrose eventually triumphed over the court, was a dramatic episode, and it has produced a great deal of discussion over the years. Scholars have been interested not only because of the intrinsic importance of the affair, but also because they have been unable to reach agreement about the sequence of events, and even about the issues involved, for the contemporary and near-contemporary sources, though they are abundant by the modest standards of ancient history, cannot easily be synthesised into a consistent story.

The conflict is usually seen as a dispute in which the court ordered Ambrose to surrender a basilica for worship by the *Homoian* Arians, who were led by Justina, the mother of the thirteen-year-old emperor Valentinian II.¹ But there is evidence that the repeated crises produced by demands for the surrender of a basilica were only episodes in a deeper and more continuous conflict. Augustine, who was in a position to know, and wrote around 397, describes the affair as the persecution of Ambrose by the empress, and the sit-in in the besieged basilica as an attempt by the people to protect Ambrose personally. 'For it was about a year ago,² or not much above, that Justina, mother to the boy emperor Valentinian, persecuted your servant Ambrose, in favour of her heresy, to which she was seduced by the Arians: the devout people watched day and night in the church, ready to die with their bishop At this time it was here first instituted after the manner of the eastern Churches, that hymns and psalms should be sung, lest the people should weaken.'³ According to Rufinus, writing in Italy not long after 400, the issue was a

1 To cite only some recent work: Williams 1995, 210–15; Humphries 1999, 121–23.

2 *Annus erat aut non multo amplius*, that is before Augustine's baptism at Easter, 24/5 April 387. The episode is the siege contemporary with *Epp.* 75a and 75, not that of *Ep.* 76, but the notice is too summary to use it for precise dating.

3 Augustine, *Conf.* 9.7 (translation by W. Watts in the Loeb Classical Library).

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 125

sustained attempt by Justina to get Ambrose to leave Milan, which culminated in an attempt to use soldiers to drag him out of church.¹ Paulinus, the deacon of Milan who wrote Ambrose's biography, perhaps as early as 412–13, also describes the conflict as a long, sustained campaign by Justina to have Ambrose removed from Milan by one means or another.² He even relates that one Euthymius made preparations to kidnap the bishop.³ A siege of the Basilica Portiana, in the course of which hymn-singing was introduced in the church of Milan, is described as the climax of a long campaign.⁴

The testimony of these witnesses is consistent in as much as none of them makes the dispute over the basilicas the central issue. Although each of them wrote close enough to the events to be well informed, none of them was trying to write a complete and impartial account of the affair. Each account has demonstrable deficiencies and omissions. Nevertheless the fact that what they describe is a campaign against Ambrose, and not resistance to an imperial command to surrender a basilica, must be significant. The focus on the demand for a basilica is found only in the letters of Ambrose. They are of course by far the fullest source and historians have generally preferred their testimony to that of the other sources. The question is whether in this case they were right to do so. It is argued here that they were not.

While the focus of three of the letters of Ambrose (*Epp.* 75 to Valentinian II, 75a *Contra Auxentium*, 76 to his sister⁵) is certainly on the basilicas, the letters do not provide a complete and consistent narrative of the conflict. The letters give us much detailed information, but their testimony leaves important gaps. That is why scholars have not so far been able to reach agreement about the order in which the letters were written, and hence remain uncertain of the overall chronology of the events described in them. Any attempt to reconstruct the conflict must therefore still start with a discussion of the chronology of the letters. Here I will argue that *Epp.* 75 and

1 Rufinus, *HE* 2.15–16, confirmed by Sozomen, *HE* 7.13, Socrates, *HE* 5.11, Theodoret, *HE* 5.17.

2 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 12–13.

3 Alluded to also in *Ep.* 75a.15.

4 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 13. Paulinus had good sources, including the letters of Ambrose, but he wrote hagiography not history. So his description of the siege of the Portiana conflates two sieges: see below p. 126. He does not mention any attempt to break into the church by force.

5 Throughout I will refer to the *Contra Auxentium* as a 'letter', because Ambrose included it in his *Collection* of letters. The document is in fact a sermon evidently composed to be addressed to a particular congregation, but according to its heading Ambrose sent it as a memorandum to Valentinian II. See also p. 143 below.

75a – which are evidently closely linked to each other, and both have allusions to a law, which I think cannot be any other than *CT* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386 – were both composed around the date of the promulgation of that law, with *Ep.* 75 having been composed a little earlier than *Ep.* 75a. As for *Ep.* 76, it is generally agreed that it was written around Easter 386.¹

In favouring this chronology I am only reasserting what over the years has been the majority view,² but it is view which has been rejected in important recent studies of the problem. In her edition, Michaela Zelzer gives the date of *Ep.* 75a as Palm Sunday 386.³ This is almost certainly wrong. Whatever the circumstances alluded to in *Ep.* 75 and 75a, they are not the same as those described in *Ep.* 76, addressed to Ambrose's sister, Marcellina. For instance, in *Ep.* 76 Ambrose and his congregation find that their church is surrounded by soldiers, but not for more than twenty-four hours, that is from Wednesday to Thursday, and the soldiers' main concern was not with Ambrose's church, but with one nearby, which they proceeded to occupy.⁴ In *Ep.* 75a too Ambrose is preaching in a church surrounded by soldiers.⁵ But this siege, if that is the right word, has already lasted at least two days (and probably considerably longer), and the threat is directed against Ambrose personally.⁶ This is the siege described by Augustine, Paulinus and the ecclesiastical historians.⁷ It follows that the siege described in *Ep.* 76 is not the same as that mentioned in *Epp.* 75a and 75, and if *Ep.* 76 was written around Easter 386,⁸ as is almost certain, neither *Ep.* 75, nor *Ep.* 75a can have been.

In his brilliant book McLynn has argued that both *Ep.* 75a (the sermon *contra Auxentium*) and *Ep.* 75 (addressed to Valentinian) were composed late in spring 386, and therefore were later than *Ep.* 76. He argues that they describe an attempt by the court to reverse the loss of face it had suffered at the hands of Ambrose in the conflict over the basilica during Lent 386, which is described in *Ep.* 76. According to McLynn's reconstruction of the events, it was in spring or early summer 386, at any rate some time after the

1 Dudden 1935, 272–79, assigns *Ep.* 76 to Lent AD 385. In fact *Ep.* 76 has no absolutely sure indication of its date, but the conflict over the surrender of a basilica which it describes is certainly not the same as that described in *Ep.* 75a.29 which definitely took place in 385.

2 For example, Palanque 1923, 139–64.

3 *CSEL* 82.10, pp. xxxiv and 82.

4 *Ep.* 76.13, 24–25.

5 *Ep.* 75a.4.

6 *Ep.* 75a.10.

7 See notes 3–5 above.

8 In 386 Easter fell on 5 April.

events related in *Ep.* 76, that Ambrose was summoned to appear before the imperial consistory to take part in a formal debate between himself and the *Homoian* bishop Auxentius, which was to be judged by panel of judges chosen by each of the combatants.¹ But this reconstruction does not fit the basic situation of these two documents. Neither *Epp.* 75a nor 75 refers to the defence of the 'New Basilica' which Ambrose described to his sister in *Ep.* 76.² What is referred to in *Ep.* 75a is the demand to hand over the Basilica Portiana, which was made in spring or summer 385. This on its own would make it likely that *Epp.* 75a and 75 are earlier than *Ep.* 76. But there is a further reason for dating *Epp.* 75a and 75 before *Ep.* 76: both *Epp.* 75a and 75 are very much concerned with a law which has either been recently promulgated, or is about to be promulgated,³ and which is going to be one topic among several to be discussed by Ambrose and the *Homoian* bishop Auxentius, in the presence of the imperial consistory and of a jury composed of men chosen by the rival bishops. This law must be *CTh* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386, which gives freedom of assembly to the Arians, and threatens with capital punishment anyone who interferes with that freedom. In his sermon Ambrose deliberately exaggerates the range of behaviour threatened with capital punishment: 'Who is the man, then, who when reading that the command has been issued at a stroke through numerous provinces that whoever opposes the emperor is to be cut down with the sword, that whoever does not surrender a temple of God is to be killed immediately, ... could afford to say to the emperor, your law does not meet with my approval?'⁴

Gottlieb, who wants *Epp.* 75 and 75a to refer to events after Easter 386, has seen that if the law mentioned in these letters as having been recently promulgated or being about to be promulgated is *CTh* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386, it is very unlikely that the two letters were written three or more months later, as they would have to be if they relate describe events that happened after Easter 386.⁵ Gottlieb has therefore argued for the existence of a second

1 McLynn 1994, 196–208.

2 *Ep.* 76.1.

3 Discussion is to be about a law whose terms are already known: *Ep.* 75.9–10; the law is also mentioned in *Ep.* 75a.24.

4 *Ep.* 75.11, cf. 75a.23. Ambrose pretends to believe that the law had been dictated by Auxentius to the emperor.

5 G. Gottlieb ('Der Mailänder Kirchenstreit', *Mus. Helv.* 42 (1985), 37–55), McLynn (1994, 207) and A. Lenox-Conyngham ('The Topography of the Basilica Conflict of AD 385/6 at Milan', *Historia* 31 (1982), 353–63) also accept a post-Easter date for *Epp.* 75 and 75a, while

pro-Arian law, one of wider scope than the law of January 386, a law which has not come down to us, but which would have been promulgated in spring 386 in an attempt – so it is argued – by the young emperor, his mother and the court to reverse the defeat Ambrose had inflicted on them, when he had successfully resisted the demand for a basilica after Easter 386. But the existence of a second law is extremely unlikely. All passages mentioning a law giving the Arians freedom to assemble, and threatening with capital punishment anyone who sought to stop them, quite clearly refer to *CTh* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386. This is quite clearly the law also mentioned by the ecclesiastical historians, which the responsible official, a certain *magister memoriae* Benevolius,¹ refused to draw up,² and which according to Sozomen gave the Arians the right to assemble, and threatened with death anyone who would obstruct the law.³ If there had been a second law in spring 386 it would surely have met with such a chorus of Nicene abuse as would have come down to us. We would not expect Ambrose to be the only Nicene author to mention it.⁴ Rufinus especially could hardly have failed to bring it up in his *Ecclesiastical History*. So it is all but certain that the law mentioned in *Epp.* 75 and 75a is *CTh* 16.1.4.

There is a further point. In *Ep.* 75 Ambrose writes: ‘Would that it were patently clear to me that the Church will in no circumstances be handed over to the Arians ...’⁵ This suggests that he was still uncertain what the implications of the new law would be. The argument of *Ep.* 75a. 10–16 shows that the law had been promulgated, but there evidently remained considerable uncertainty how it was going to be interpreted and applied in practice. The encompassing of Ambrose’s church with soldiers cannot be a consequence of Ambrose having refused to obey the law. The acute phase of Ambrose’s dispute with the court must have begun well before the law was issued. It follows that the government’s decision to station soldiers around Ambrose’s

identifying the law with that of 23 January 386. But Ambrose writes of the law as a measure which might still be discussed (*Ep.* 75.9–11) or at least as of a measure whose full implications are not yet clear, not one which has been in force for several months. Their arguments to move the date of these letters from January to spring 386 do not therefore convince.

1 See *PLRE* I.161, s.v. Benivolus.

2 Sozomen, *HE* 7.13; Rufinus, *HE* 2.16.

3 Sozomen, *HE* 7.13.

4 It is true that Ambrose seems to be alluding to a law of wider scope than *CTh* 16.1.4 seems to be. But this is likely to be rhetoric. He is arousing the indignation of his congregation.

5 *Ep.* 75.19. Ambrose here means the Church, not a church building.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 129

church goes back to an earlier stage of the dispute, a stage about which we are hardly at all informed by Ambrose.

From incidental references in the letters and the other sources we can try to reconstruct the earlier stages of the dispute. Ambrose had incurred the hostility of the strongly *Homoian* Justina by helping to appoint a Nicene bishop at Sirmium, probably in winter 379.¹ Not long after, Valentinian II and Justina and members of their court abandoned Sirmium, which now came under the government of Theodosius, and took up residence at Milan, which was in the part of the Empire ruled by Gratian the brother of Valentinian. *Homoian* Arianism was thus strengthened in that city.² It was strengthened further when in August 383 Gratian was killed by the usurper Maximus, and the twelve-year-old Valentinian II was left the sole ruler of the West with his mother Justina in something like the position of regent. At this time Valentinian, like his mother, was a *Homoian*.³ It was probably now that Auxentius, formerly bishop of Durostorum, established himself at Milan as bishop of the Arians.⁴ Ambrose had for some time been an aggressive champion of Nicene Christianity. The situation must have been extremely difficult. Encouraged by Justina a man named Euthymius is said to have made preparations to kidnap Ambrose.⁵ Sometime in spring or summer 385 Ambrose was ordered to hand over the Basilica Portiana for Arian worship.⁶ It has often been assumed that the church was demanded for regular worship of the Arian community of Milan, but the actual wording of the texts suggests that the church would be required only for a particular service, or series of services, for which the emperor would leave his palace, and proceed through the streets of the city in formal procession.⁷ Having been

1 See T. Barnes, 'Ambrose and Gratian', *Antiquité Tardive* 7 (1999), 165–74.

2 Cf. above p. 11.

3 He remained a *Homoian* at least until 387 when he was forced to seek the protection of Theodosius. See below p. 371.

4 On Auxentius see Williams 1995, 208–10. He had come to Milan perhaps as recently as late 384.

5 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 12–13. According to Paulinus this was exactly a year before the siege during which Ambrose taught his congregation to sing hymns, that would be in autumn 384. But the reference to the *currus* prepared for Ambrose (*Ep.* 75a.15) suggests that the incident happened around the time of that siege, that is late in 385.

6 *Ep.* 75a.29.

7 *Ep.* 75a.30: *ergo non debet imperator unam basilicam habere ad quam procedat, et plus vult Ambrosius posse quam imperator, ut imperatori prodeundi facultatem neget.* Cf also *Ep.* 76.11, 27.

ordered to surrender the basilica, Ambrose appeared in the imperial consistory and refused to do so, on the ground that it was to be used for *Homoian*, or as he would say Arian, worship. There was an outbreak of popular protest, and the court had to give in.

The significance of this demand has recently been clarified by McLynn in an important paper.¹ McLynn convincingly argues that it was only in the second half of the fourth century that emperors began to attend public church services, as opposed to services held in their palace. Even then they did not attend regularly, but only on special occasions, especially at Easter. But the emperor's presence at a service, and above all his procession to and from church, soon became an important part of the imperial ceremonial. At the same time it gave the bishop a new means of putting pressure on the emperor, an opportunity which Ambrose seems to have been one of the first to exploit. It is likely that the conflict between Ambrose and Justina and Valentinian in 385–6 was aggravated by this situation

The court did not forget its defeat over the Basilica Portiana. This is not surprising as Ambrose had prevented the emperor from making a public demonstration of his greatness, and piety. Some time later, perhaps in December 385, the government tried to force Ambrose to leave the city. It appears that soldiers were sent to arrest him in his church.² The congregation protected him. The church was now surrounded by armed soldiers, while Ambrose remained in the church together with his congregation, and maintained their morale by teaching them to sing hymns.³ There is no suggestion that Ambrose was to be formally deposed.⁴ It would probably have been difficult for the court at Milan to depose a Nicene bishop when the strongly Nicene Theodosius I was ruling in the East. In any case Ambrose had demonstrated that he had powerful support from the people. Nor does there seem to have been any further attempt to arrest him, though he left the church to visit friends or the tombs of martyrs every day.⁵ Various forms of

1 N. McLynn, 'The Transformation of Imperial Church-going in the Fourth Century', in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds), *Approaching Late Antiquity: the Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, Oxford 2004, 235–70.

2 Socrates, *HE* 5.11; Sozomen, *HE* 7.13; Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 12; cf. also Augustine, *Conf.* 9.7.

3 *Ep.* 75a.34.

4 See below p. 132.

5 *Ep.* 75.18.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 131

pressure were, however, applied.¹ Ambrose was accused of misuse of church funds to buy the physical support of the people of Milan.² In other words he was accused of causing public disturbances, or of preparing the means to do so. Similar charges were later to be made against John Chrysostom at Constantinople.³ But unlike Chrysostom Ambrose was not formally charged. The aim seems to have been to frighten the bishop in order to get him to leave Milan voluntarily.⁴

Then a law was issued which guaranteed the *Homoians*, that is the followers of the faith of Rimini, freedom of assembly, and threatened with capital punishment anyone who interfered with that right. Ambrose was certain to resist. An even more dangerous crisis was building up. At this point the court summoned the two leaders of the rival groups of Christians to a debate. The meeting was going to be something like a law suit between Auxentius, the Arian bishop, and Ambrose himself before a jury on which both sides were equally represented.⁵ But what precisely was to be discussed at the meeting? What issues were to be raised? What compromises put forward? On the available evidence, that is, of the two letters of Ambrose and nothing else, these questions cannot be answered with any degree of certainty, though the practical consequences of the law granting freedom of assembly to the *Homoians* must surely have been a major issue. Ambrose does not go into the issues, whether theological or practical, which were to be discussed in the proposed debate in either of his letters. The point he makes to the emperor is that it would not be proper for a bishop to discuss the business of the Church in a secular forum. Addressing his congregation he is concerned

1 *Ep.* 75a 15. One might perhaps compare his position to that of John Chrysostom at Constantinople between his second breach with the imperial family before Christmas 403 and his second and final exile in June 404. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop*, Oxford 1995, 241–49; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *From Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, Aldershot: Variorum 1995, no. IV, 19–23.

2 *Ep.* 75 a.33.

3 For charges against Chrysostom, see Kelly 1995, 299–301.

4 *Ep.* 75.18.

5 McLynn 1994, 198, draws attention to the parallel with the jury of ten bishops which on the orders of Valentinian I, father of Valentinian II, had in AD 364 heard the charges of heresy which the Nicene Hilary of Poitiers had made against the elder Auxentius, *Homoian* bishop of Milan. But Ambrose was to make his case before a panel of laymen (*Ep.* 75.4, 15) and the while agenda involved discussion of 'the faith', it appears to have been wider. Cf. D. H. Williams, 'The Anti-Arian Campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the *Liber contra Auxentium*', *Church History* 61 (1992), 7–22.

to impress them with the terrible danger to Nicene Christianity presented by Auxentius. He clearly thought that handing over of a church would be one of the issues.¹ But he also insinuates that the real issue was not the fate of a single church or basilica but the fate of the Church, that is the Church of Milan, or rather the Church as a whole. It is in fact unlikely that the fate of the Church of Milan was on the formal agenda. In his letter to the emperor Ambrose suggests that the ultimate issue was who was to be bishop of Milan.² But this does not mean that his deposition was on the agenda of the proposed debate. For in the address to his congregation (*Ep.* 75a) Ambrose says nothing of a threat to depose and replace him. If there had really been such a threat, Ambrose would surely have mentioned it in a sermon whose principal purpose was to rally his supporters. In any case Valentinian and his officials could surely not think of deposing a Nicene bishop and replacing him by a *Homoian* as long as they were dependent on the goodwill of Theodosius I in the East.

One might conjecture that the ministers of Valentinian intended to hold discussions similar to those that Theodosius had held at Constantinople in 383.³ But while the discussions at Constantinople were started in the hope, which proved vain, that the disputatious Christian sects might agree on a common creed, the debate at Milan would perhaps have been more concerned with the terms on which Nicenes and *Homoians* might coexist.

Whatever the ultimate purpose of the proposed debate, Ambrose decided that he could afford to turn down the summons to the consistory, and to rely on the support of some fellow bishops,⁴ and his immense popularity among the people of Milan to protect him from the normal consequences of defying the court.⁵ So he proceeded to deliver the highly demagogic *Contra Auxentium* (*Ep.* 75a) to his congregation, which had already been under siege, or at least watched over by units of the army for some, perhaps considerable, time. In that sermon he did not give a clear account of the dispute. He did

1 *Ep.* 75a.17 rejects the demand to hand over a basilica, but in cc. 18–19 he suggests that to comply would be equivalent to surrendering ‘the inheritance of my fathers’, i.e. the Church of Milan.

2 *Ep.* 75.6.

3 Sozomen, *HE* 7.12.

4 *Ep.* 75.18.

5 It is fashionable to belittle the seemingly astonishing political feats of Ambrose, but there can surely be no doubt that he had gained a remarkable hold over a large part of the population of Milan. Without that his defiance of the court would have been impossible.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 133

not want his hearers to have the facts to judge for themselves whether his stand, which was in fact a refusal to enter into discussions, was reasonable or not. He deliberately made the scope of the dispute to be discussed as wide as he could. He hints that the issue may be a return to the imperial recognition of *Homoian* Arianism, as defined by the Council of Rimini. He maintains that he will be required to hand over at least one church,¹ though he does not explain whether he thinks that the church would have to be handed over permanently, or only for particular services attended by the emperor. He anticipates that he will be liable to the severe punishment set by the recent law if he does not surrender it. After he had in this way assured himself of popular support,² he wrote *Ep.* 75 to the emperor, explaining that it was quite impossible for him as a bishop to attend before a secular body to discuss Church affairs.

One interpretation of the context of the letters is that Ambrose had already defied the new law, and that the soldiers around the church were intended to compel him to give in. But this interpretation is not consistent with the evidence, which makes it quite clear that the siege undergone by Ambrose together with his congregation in his church, following the alleged attempt to arrest him, started well before the promulgation of the law, though it was still going on when the law was promulgated.³ The law merely increased the already considerable pressure on Ambrose.

Owing to the fragmentary nature of our seemingly abundant evidence we do not know how the episode described in *Epp.* 75a and 75 ended. It looks as if Ambrose got away with his refusal to appear before the imperial consistory. Certainly when our information resumes, that is, in Easter week 386, the siege had been lifted, and the contentious issues raised in *Epp.* 75a and 75 were no longer relevant; at any rate they do not figure in *Ep.* 76. What does figure is a renewal of the demand to surrender a basilica. This command seems to have been delivered to Ambrose shortly before Easter week.⁴ The demand was originally for surrender of the Basilica Portiana.⁵ It was subsequently changed to the New Basilica, almost certainly the cathedral, known in the Middle Ages as S. Tecla, whose foundations have been excavated under the Piazza del

1 *Ep.* 75a.17.

2 In *Ep.* 75.17 Ambrose writes that he would have come to the consistory 'if the people had allowed me'. But little time can have separated the two letters.

3 Socrates, *HE* 5.11; Sozomen, *HE* 7.13

4 *Ep.* 76.2.

5 Milanese tradition is that this was the church now known as San Vittore al Corpo.

Duomo, in front of Milan's present cathedral. There is no need to discuss that stage of the conflict, since it has been reconstructed convincingly by McLynn and others.¹ *Ep.* 76 ends with Ambrose once more triumphant; at least he seems to have gained his point, but he had also laid himself open to the very grave accusation of being a 'usurper'.² We do not know how the court reacted. Once more we are left for some time without information.

The final episode in the conflict occurred early in June 386, when Ambrose thought that he had been inspired to find the bodies of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius.³ When the bodies were being taken in a solemn procession to the Basilica Ambrosiana⁴ a blind man was given back his sight. Other cures and exorcisms followed. Ambrose had the relics buried under the altar, where he was himself to be buried between them. He saw the discovery of the martyrs as a sign from God justifying the stand he had taken, and witnessing to the truth of the Nicene faith. From the start he did his very considerable best to make sure that as many people as possible should see the discovery of the bodies in the same way as he did. He described the episode in *Ep.* 77, which he sent to his sister, but we can be sure that the account was intended for much wider readership, and was meant – in the words of Augustine – 'to repress the fury of this woman the empress'.⁵

By this time the political situation had changed. The usurper Maximus had written from Gaul rebuking Valentinian for persecuting Ambrose and the Catholics.⁶ It looked as if he was looking for an excuse to invade Italy. Valentinian, Justina and their officials could no longer afford to antagonise the formidable bishop of their capital. Indeed on one interpretation of *Ep.* 30 they needed to make use of his diplomatic skills to persuade Maximus not to attack them. It is suggested that it was in late summer 386 that Ambrose travelled to Trier to negotiate a second time with Maximus on Valentinian's behalf.⁷ This reconstruction certainly provides a strong and ironical ending to the dramatic conflict between Ambrose and the *Homoian* court. Unfortunately the dating of the second embassy to Trier remains

1 McLynn 1994, 181–96.

2 See note 5 on *Ep.* 76.22–25, p. 170 below.

3 See the discussion in McLynn 1994, 209–19.

4 Today Sant' Ambrogio.

5 *Conf.* 9.7.

6 Rufinus, *HE* 2.16; *Collectio Avellana* 39.

7 According to Zos. 4.42, Valentinian's ambassador was called Dominus.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 135

Chronological table: Ambrose's conflict with the empress Justina at Milan, 385–86

Dates	Course of events (with sources)
385	
spring/summer	(i) <i>Conflict over the Portian Basilica</i> • Demand to hand over the Basilica Portiana for a church service to be attended by the emperor; this demand refused by Ambrose (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75a.29–30; cf. <i>Ep.</i> 76.1)
(?) late summer/ autumn	(ii) <i>Personal campaign against Ambrose</i> • Ambrose under pressure to leave Milan (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75a.1 and 14–15) • Threats made to kidnap Ambrose (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75a.15–16; cf. Paulinus, <i>V. Ambr.</i> 12; Sozomen, <i>HE</i> 7.13; Augustine, <i>Conf.</i> 9.7) • Accusations of misuse of church funds made against Ambrose (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75a.33)
(?) winter	• Ambrose holds services in church surrounded by troops (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75a.4 and 34)
386	
23 January	(iii) <i>Imperial legislation in support of the Homoians and Ambrose's dispute with Auxentius</i> • Law declares freedom of assembly for Homoians (<i>CTh</i> 16.1.4; cf. Ambrose, <i>Epp.</i> 75.9–11, 75a.23–24; Rufinus, <i>HE</i> 2.16; Sozomen, <i>HE</i> 7.13)
late January	• Ambrose summoned to court to dispute his claim with Auxentius (Ambrose, <i>Epp.</i> 75.1, 75a.26–29) • Soon afterwards, Ambrose preaches the sermon <i>Contra Auxentium</i> (= Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75a) • Ambrose refuses to be summoned to court (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 75.17), and writes <i>Ep.</i> 75 to Valentinian explaining why
immediately before Easter	(iv) <i>Conflict over the New Basilica</i> • Friday: demand by imperial courtiers for Ambrose to surrender the New Basilica as well as the Portian Basilica to Homoians (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.1–2) • Saturday: popular display of support for Ambrose provokes the intervention of the praetorian prefect (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.3) • Sunday: Ambrose, while celebrating mass, is alerted to conflict between Catholics and Homoians at the Portian Basilica, and abduction of Homoian priest Castulus (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.4–5)
early part of Easter week	• Imperial crackdown on traders and officials associated with Ambrose (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.6–7) • Imperial officials demand that Ambrose surrenders the New Basilica (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.8)
Wednesday of Easter week (1 April)	• Troops sent to besiege the basilica (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.9–10) • Troops occupy the New Basilica (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.11–12) • Ambrose celebrates mass in the Basilica Vetus, but soldiers begin to enter it also (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.13) • Ambrose preaches his sermon on Job (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.14–21) • Imperial attempt to sieze the New Basilica abandoned (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.20, 22, and 24) • Imperial notary demands that Ambrose end his resistance (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.22) • Ambrose unable to leave the church because of the besieging troops (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.24)
Thursday of Easter week (2 April) some time after Easter Sunday (5 April) spring/summer	• Ambrose preaches a sermon on Jonah (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.25) • Valentinian orders the troops to lift the siege and rescinds punitive measures against Ambrose's supporters (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 76.26) • Composition of <i>Ep.</i> 76
June	• Magnus Maximus rebukes Valentinian II for his treatment of Ambrose (Rufinus, <i>HE</i> 2.16; <i>Collectio Avellana</i> 39) • Discovery of the tombs of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius (Ambrose, <i>Ep.</i> 77; cf. Paulinus, <i>V. Ambr.</i> 14; Augustine, <i>Conf.</i> 9.7)

uncertain. The arguments for dating it to 384/5, that is before the conflict, are if anything stronger than those for dating it in 386.¹ However that might be, by summer the conflict between Ambrose and the court was over and Ambrose had won.

It is an interesting fact that none of the ecclesiastical historians, not even Rufinus, mentions Ambrose's resistance to the surrender of a church to the Arians. As far as they are concerned, the dispute arose out of an attempt by Justina to make Ambrose leave Milan. We can only form a very rough idea of the practical questions that lay at the root of that intractable dispute. The simplification that made the conflict into a dispute over a basilica is Ambrose's. That is how he wanted the conflict to be seen. That is why he included the three documents in the *Collection* of selected letters. And Ambrose achieved the result he wanted, as he usually did.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 75 (MAUR. 21)

To the most clement emperor and most blessed Augustus Valentinian Ambrose the bishop.

1. Dalmatius² the tribune and notary,³ on the instructions, as he alleged, of your Clemency, met me, demanding that I too should choose judges, as Auxentius had already done. And yet he did not indicate the names of the men who had been asked to attend, but he made the additional point that there would be a debate about this in the consistory, and that your Piety would be the umpire.⁴

2. To this demand I am making what I think is a proper reply. And nobody ought to judge me guilty of criminal obstinacy,⁵ when I uphold what your father of august memory has not only ruled in a verbal response, but also confirmed in his laws: 'In a case involving the Faith, or any ecclesiastical order,⁶ the judge ought to be one who is not unequal in rank⁷ and of similar

1 See appendix 1 pp. 349–50 below. Leaving aside the uncertain dating of the execution of the Priscillianists, *Ep.* 30 makes obvious references to events of 383, but none that can certainly be related to events of 385/6.

2 Nothing else is known of him.

3 See Jones 1964, 572–75.

4 On the question of what would be debated see above pp. 131–32.

5 *Contumacia*, the offence of refusing to obey the order of a magistrate or a court, as the early martyrs had done when they refused a magistrate's order to sacrifice.

6 *Ordo*, ecclesiastical rank.

7 *Qui nec munere impar sit*.

legal status.¹ These are after all the words of the imperial rescript, and what this means is that he wanted priests to judge cases involving priests. Further, if it happened that on another occasion a bishop was accused, and a case involving his morals had to be decided, he wanted this too to fall under the jurisdiction of a bishop.

3. Who then is the one whose reply displayed criminal obstinacy?² Is it he who desires you to be like your father, or he who wants you to be unlike him? But perhaps certain people reject as worthless the judgement of so great an emperor as he who both demonstrated his faith by the steadfastness of his confession,³ and proclaimed his wisdom by the prosperity of a revived commonwealth!

4. When have you heard, most clement emperor, that in a case involving the faith laymen have sat in judgement over a bishop? Have I then been so influenced by a certain kind of flattery as to forget the legal rights of a bishop,⁴ and to think that the power which God gave to me personally is to be entrusted to others? If a bishop must receive instruction from a layman what is to follow? The layman is to expound and the bishop is to listen; the bishop is to learn from the layman! But surely, whether we examine the succession of divine writings, or the events of history, who could possibly deny that in a case involving the faith, I repeat, in a case involving the faith, it has been usual for bishops to pass judgement on Christian emperors, not emperors on bishops?

5. You will, by God's grace, approach more closely to the mature outlook of one advanced in years,⁵ and then you will revise your judgement as to what kind of bishop this fellow is who is subjecting the legal rights of a bishop to the judgement of laymen. Your father, who by God's grace reached a riper age, used to say: 'It is not for me to adjudicate between bishops'. Now your Clemency says: 'I must adjudicate'. And he, although he had been baptised in Christ, thought that he was not competent to undertake so weighty a judgement. But your Clemency, for whom the sacrament of baptism still remains to be merited, claims jurisdiction over the faith,

1 The rescript has not survived, but cf. *Ep. ex.* 7.2, p. 249 below and Barnes 2001, 236–37. See also Sozomen, *HE* VI.7, provision for the reinstatement of deposed bishops by bishops of the neighbouring province. *CTh* 16.2.4 (412), clerics to be accused before bishops.

2 *Contumaciter respondit*, cf. p. 135 n. 5.

3 See Socrates, *HE* 4.1; Sozomen, *HE* 6.6.

4 *Ius sacerdotale*.

5 Valentinian II was 15 in 386, and died in 392.

even though you have no acquaintance with the sacraments of that faith yourself.¹

6. What kind of judges he² has chosen, we can leave to conjecture, since he is afraid to reveal their names. But by all means let any he has chosen – if there are any – come to the Church, and let them listen alongside the people; not so that any of them should take his seat as a judge, but so that each one can rethink his own preference, and choose whom he will follow. The matter at issue is the bishop of this Church. If the people hear him, and think that he makes the better case, let them follow his Faith. I shall not begrudge it.

7. I refrain from mentioning the fact that the people have already made their choice. I remain silent on the fact that they demanded from the father of your Clemency the bishop they now have.³ I remain silent on the fact that the father of your Piety promised that there would be peace, if the man elected took up the episcopacy. I accepted the assurance of these promises.

8. But if he (Auxentius) boasts of the support of a few foreigners,⁴ let him be bishop in the place where those people come from, who think that he should be have the title of bishop conferred on him. For I for my part neither recognise him as a bishop, nor know where he comes from.

9. Emperor, when have we determined a matter on which you have already announced your decision, and what is more, issued laws⁵ forbidding anybody from deciding otherwise? When you prescribed this for others, you prescribed it for yourself as well. For as the emperor issues laws, he must be the first to observe them. Do you really want me to be there to watch how the men chosen to be judges will start either to come out against your decision, or more likely plead that they cannot oppose so severe and unbending an ordinance of the emperor?

1 Ambrose is saying that Valentinian II will be making a judgement about the faith, even though he has not yet had the faith fully explained to him. Ambrose is alluding to the fact that Valentinian had neither yet been baptised nor prepared for baptism, cf. *Ep.* 76.4.

2 Auxentius as in c. 5.

3 An edict of Valentinian I ensured the election of Ambrose. Strictly speaking Valentinian only predicted (not promised) peace as a result of Ambrose's election. On the circumstances of the election see Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 6–9, and Rufinus, *HE* 2.11. Cf. above pp. 9–10.

4 Ambrose claims that the Arian supporters of Auxentius, like Auxentius himself, are foreigners, cf. *Ep.* 75a.22. In as much as they included Gothic units of the army, that is surely right, but the strength of support for Arianism among the population of Milan was probably not negligible either, though it is impossible to ascertain.

5 In this case almost certainly *CTh* 16.1.4 of 386. See above pp. 127–28.

10. But this is the behaviour of a contumacious bishop¹ not of a law-abiding² one. Look, emperor, you are already withdrawing your law in part,³ would that you were withdrawing it not in part, but in entirety! For I would not have your law to be above the law of God. God's law has taught us what course our lives must follow.⁴ Human laws cannot teach us that. What they usually do is to compel apprehensive people to change their ways.⁵ Faith they cannot inspire.

11. What man is there who, when he reads that the command has been issued at one stroke throughout numerous provinces that whoever opposes the emperor is to be cut down with the sword, that whoever does not surrender a temple of God is to be killed immediately, what man, I ask, could possibly either on his own, or as one of a handful, afford to say to the emperor: 'your law does not meet with my approval?' Priests are not allowed to say this, are laymen? And are we really going to have somebody pronounce judgement in a case concerning the faith who must necessarily either hope to obtain a favour or fear to give offence?

12. Furthermore am I really to nominate laymen to be judges knowing that they will be either outlawed or killed if they uphold the truth of the faith, as this is prescribed in the promulgated law concerning the faith? I would therefore be exposing men to either apostasy or to punishment.

13. Ambrose is not so important a figure that he can debase the episcopal office in his own interest. The life of one individual is worth less than the dignity of the entire gathering of bishops on whose advice I composed this letter.⁶ They warned me that some pagan or Jew might be chosen by Auxentius, and that we would be handing such men a triumph over Christ, if we allowed them to give a verdict over Christ. What delights those people more than to hear of some wrong done to Christ? What can give them greater

1 *Sacerdos*.

2 *Modestus*.

3 To organise a debate of the subject matter of a law implies a willingness to modify its terms. So to have a debate means withdrawing it in part. At the end of c. 16 Ambrose suggests that a genuine debate would only be possible if the law had been withdrawn altogether. On procedure of legislation see *CJ* 1.14.8 (AD 446) and J. Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1999, 46.

4 *Quid sequamur*, literally: 'what are we to follow?'

5 *Commutationem*.

6 Ambrose worked skilfully and hard to establish a position of leadership among the bishops of northern Italy, cf. pp. 21–22 above. We do not know how many bishops he had actually consulted about this letter.

pleasure than that – God forbid – the divinity of Christ is denied? It is obvious that the Arian happily agrees with them, seeing that he calls Christ a creature, a view which pagans and Jews are also very keen to declare.

14. This is what was written at the council of Rimini.¹ This council I abominate with horror, adhering as I do to the discussions of the council of Nicaea,² from which neither death nor the sword will be able to separate me.³ This is the faith which the parent of your Clemency, Theodosius the most blessed emperor, also followed and endorsed. This is the faith held by the provinces of Gaul, and by the provinces of Spain and they maintain it with devoted confession of the Holy Spirit.⁴

15. If there must be discussion, I have learnt to hold it in the Church, which is what my ancestors have done. If there must be a conference about the faith, then that meeting ought to be one of bishops, as happened under Constantine, a *princeps* of august memory, who issued no laws in advance of their meeting, but granted the bishops liberty of judgement.

This was done also under Constantius, emperor of august memory, heir to his father's dignity. But what began well was concluded otherwise. For at the start the bishops had composed a sound creed.⁵ But then, when certain persons wanted to make decisions within the palace concerning the faith within the palace, they managed deceitfully to get those decisions of the bishops altered.⁶ But the bishops immediately restored the formula which had not been tampered with, and the majority at any rate at Rimini approved of the creed of the Nicene council, and condemned the Arian decrees.⁷

16. If Auxentius calls for a council so that he can argue about the Faith – though it really should not be necessary to trouble so many bishops for the

1 The council of bishops held at Rimini in 359, which endorsed a creed that the Son was 'like the father as the Scriptures say and teach'. Cf. p. 8 above.

2 The first ecumenical council was assembled by Constantine at Nicaea in AD 325 and affirmed that the Son was of the same substance as the Father (*homoousion*).

3 Echoing Rom. 8.38.

4 The suggestion is that neither Theodosius in the East, nor Maximus, the usurper in control of Gaul and Spain, would be happy with an 'Arianising' colleague in Italy.

5 Socrates, *HE* 2.37; Sozomen, *HE* 4.17; Theodoret, *HE* 2.21.

6 Sozomen, *HE* 4.19.

7 After the bishops assembled at Rimini had been prevailed upon to accept the *Homoian* creed, they did not collectively restate the Nicene creed, but condemned the use of *ousia* and *homoousios* (Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius*, 2.18 = L. R. Wickham (ed.) *Hilary of Poitiers, Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth Century Church*, TTH 25, Liverpool 1997, 87).

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 141

sake of one individual, who if he was *an angel from heaven*¹ ought not to be given preference over the peace of the churches – when I hear that a council is assembling, I shall not fail to be there. So if you want there to be a debate, abolish the law!²

17. I would have come, emperor, to the consistory of your Clemency to make these remarks in person if either the bishops or the people had allowed me, but they kept saying that discussion concerning the faith should be held in Church in the presence of the people.

18. I wish, emperor, that you had not declared that I was to go away, wherever I wished. I have been walking about openly every day. No one has been watching over me.³ You ought to have decided a place of exile for me wherever you wished, for I was offering myself [for arrest] to anyone. Now the bishops⁴ are saying to me: 'it does not make much difference whether you leave or whether you surrender the altar of Christ, for by leaving, you will surrender it'.⁵

19. Would that it were patently clear to me that the Church⁶ in no circumstances will be handed over to the Arians! I would then voluntarily offer myself to the judgement of your Clemency. But if I am the only one to raise my voice in objection, why have instructions gone out for the occupation

1 Gal. 1.8.

2 *Tolle legem* must mean 'abolish the law', and not as Beyenka translates 'pass the law'. The law, as in c. 10, is *CTh* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386.

3 In *Ep.* 75a.1 Ambrose uses the same verb, *asservare*, to describe the behaviour of his hearers, who are watching over his safety.

4 Ambrose has taken the bold decision to disobey the emperor's summons to the consistory only after consulting a synod of bishops and gaining their support.

5 The point of this paragraph is, I think, that before the issue of the new law arose, the court had tried in various ways to get Ambrose to leave Milan. At that stage Ambrose would have allowed himself to be sent into exile. But now the law has been issued, and with it the likelihood, as Ambrose thinks, that a church and wider concessions to the 'Arians' will be demanded. Now he can no longer allow himself to be exiled. The implication is that now he must resist to the point of martyrdom.

6 *Ecclesia* as also in *Ep.* 75a.3 which this passage seems to echo. *Ecclesia* can mean either church (building) or Church (community). In these two passages it seems to refer to the Church, i.e. the Church of Milan, or indeed the universal Church. The mention later in this chapter of an order to occupy all other *ecclesiae* must be to buildings. But the use of the word 'all' shows that Ambrose is worried, or at least professes to be worried, for the Church as a whole. It can be inferred from this chapter that Ambrose is still uncertain of the implications of the law. He knows that the law has been signed. But he does not yet know its full wording, for he does not know how precisely it will affect the status of his Church. Contrary to the impression Ambrose gives in *Ep.* 75a, the whole business is still subject to discussion.

of all the other churches?¹ Would that there was an assurance that no one is out to harm the churches! As for me, I ask you to pronounce any sentence you wish.

20. Therefore emperor, graciously accept the fact that I have not been able to come to the consistory. I have not learnt to stand up in a consistory other than on your behalf,² and I am unable to fight my case within the palace, whose secrets I neither know, nor wish to know.³

EPISTULA 75A (MAUR. 21A) CONTRA AUXENTIUM

Introduction

This 'letter' is actually a sermon which Ambrose delivered to a congregation while the church in which the service was being held was surrounded by soldiers. The circumstances have been discussed earlier.⁴ What is notable about this sermon is that it is not focused on the law granting *Homoian* Arians freedom to assemble, but on earlier stages of the conflict, and the accusations and other forms of pressure which had been put on Ambrose in order to get him to leave Milan. The law *CT* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386, and the proposal for a debate in the imperial consistory, the topics about which Ambrose had addressed *Ep.* 75 to the emperor Valentinian, are brought up in this letter too,⁵ but only, or so it seems, as the latest of a long series of harassments that Ambrose has had to put up with. The purpose of the sermon is clearly to gain the support of his congregation in the conflict which is about to enter a more dangerous phase as a result of the new law and Ambrose's consequent rejection of a formal request to hand over a church,⁶ and even more because of his determination to refuse to attend the imperial consistory to discuss the issues raised by his opponents before the jury, half

1 There is no other evidence for these instructions. Since he is writing to the emperor he must have thought that the occupation of all churches had been ordered. Had he been misinformed, or is he 'fishing' for a formal denial?

2 Ambrose reminds Valentinian of the embassy (or embassies) to Magnus Maximus.

3 Was this declaration written with tongue in cheek? After all, it looks as if much of the letter was based on leaks of confidential discussions in the palace.

4 See pp. 125–33 above.

5 cc. 17, 18, 24–29.

6 cc. 17–18.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 143

of whose members had been nominated by them.¹ The speech canvasses the laity to support Ambrose as a potential martyr.

The 'letter' is headed by the statement in the first person that Ambrose offered it as a memorandum to Valentinian. This circumstance makes it into a letter proper, and so justifies its inclusion in a collection of letters. It is safe to say that the sermon was composed with a view to the effect it would have on Ambrose's congregation rather than the emperor. But the passages discrediting Auxentius² as well as those refuting accusations made against himself³ might be expected to help Ambrose's case at court. The text of the sermon might also disprove any suggestion that Ambrose was inciting insurrection. It is true that when he composed the sermon Ambrose did not go out of his way to be respectful and submissive to the emperor, but he did not do this in the letter to the emperor either.⁴ He was evidently aware that his position was a strong one.

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA 75A* (MAUR. 21A) *CONTRA*
*AUXENTIUM***

I, Bishop Ambrose offered this memorandum to the most clement emperor and the most blessed Augustus Valentinianus.⁵

1. I see that you have suddenly become worried and concerned for me; I am surprised that this should be so, unless perhaps it is because some of you have actually seen the tribunes giving me instructions, while others have heard that I have been directed by imperial decree⁶ to depart from here to wherever I wanted to go, and that any persons wishing to accompany me were free to do so. Have you in consequence become alarmed in case I deserted the Church, and that fearing for my own safety, I might abandon you? But you could have noticed the instructions that I sent

1 Ambrose's refusal to attend the debate is expressed as a matter of principle rather than stated to have already taken place (cc. 26 and 28).

2 cc. 17, 22–29, 37.

3 cc. 30–36.

4 See e.g. the first sentence of c. 5.

5 This nevertheless is clearly not a letter, but a sermon delivered to a congregation undergoing something like a siege.

6 Translates *mandatum*.

back,¹ to the effect that the desire to desert the Church could not possibly occur to me, since I feared the Lord of the universe more than the emperor of this world; that if force was used to drag me away from the Church, my body might be forcibly moved, but my mind could not be. So, if the emperor were to act as it is customary for holders of kingly power to act, I was ready to suffer what it is the part of a bishop to suffer.

2. Why then are you worried? I will never desert you willingly, though if force is used, resistance I know nothing about. I shall be able to lament, to weep, to groan: when I face arms, soldiers, Goths, even my tears are weapons; for such are the defences of a bishop. I neither ought, nor indeed can, resist in any other manner. But to flee and to abandon the Church is not my way, in case someone should think I did this from fear of some harsher punishment. And you yourselves know that it is my way to show respect to our emperors but not to yield to them, to offer myself willingly for punishment, and not to be frightened by what is in store for me.

3. I wish that I was certain that the Church² would under no circumstances be handed over to the heretics. I would gladly go to the emperor's palace, if it was compatible with my Episcopal duty to fight my case in the palace rather than in the church.³ But in the consistory it is usual for Christ to be present not as the accused but as the judge. Who would deny that a case concerned with the faith must be heard in the church? Whoever has confidence in his case let him come here! Let him not rely on even an emperor's prejudiced judgement, which has already been revealed by the law he has issued which is hostile to the faith, nor on the expected support of certain profiteers.⁴ I will not connive with anyone making money out of wrong done to Christ.

4. The soldiers all around us, the clashing of weapons by which the church is hemmed in do not frighten my faith, but they worry my mind in case some deadly danger to your safety may arise out of your keeping me here. I have by now learnt not to be afraid for myself, but I have begun to fear the more for you. Allow your bishop, I beg you, to enter the fray. We have an adversary who is challenging us: for our adversary *the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*,⁵ as the apostle said.

1 *Quid mandaverim*. Note that these instructions involve a refusal to go into voluntary exile (cf. *Ep.* 75.18). They are not concerned with the summons to a debate in the consistory, which was later.

2 *Ecclesia*: see my note on *Ep.* 75.19 (p. 141 above), which seems to echo this sentence.

3 That is, in a church building; presumably Ambrose means his cathedral.

4 *Ambientium*.

5 1 Pet. 5.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 145

He has been given the power without a doubt, he has been given the power, and we are not being deceived, but rather put on our guard. The devil is allowed to inflict this kind of trial, in case I may possibly be seduced from dedication to the faith by bodily wounds. You can¹ read yourselves that the devil tested holy Job with many such trials, and that finally he asked for, and was given power of the same kind, namely to test Job's body, which he proceeded to cover with sores.²

5. When it was proposed that I should hand over the church plate,³ I gave the following reply. 'If I were required to surrender anything that was my property, whether my estate, or my house, or gold or silver, whatever was at my legal disposition, I would offer willingly; but I was unable to lay hands on and surrender anything from the temple of God, which I had received to keep safe, and not to surrender. Secondly I was also safeguarding the salvation of the emperor; for just as it was not right for me to hand these things over, so it was not right for him to receive them. Let him rather receive the frank advice of a bishop: if he wants to serve his own best interest, he must draw back from wronging Christ.'

6. These words are full of humility and, as I think, full of the spirit of affection which a bishop owes to his emperor. But since *we are contending not only against flesh and blood but*, what is more serious, *against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*,⁴ that infamous tempter, the devil, acting through his minions, intensifies the conflict, and decides that I am to be tested by wounds to my body. I know, brethren, that such wounds, which we receive for Christ, are no wounds, seeing that by them life is not destroyed, but extended. Therefore, I ask you, allow the combat to take place. It is right for you to be spectators. Just reflect that if the city has some

1 *Legitis*: I have inserted 'can' to bring out the present tense. This sentence does not refer to a biblical reading which has been read at the present service. Contrast perfect of *Ep.* 76.14: *audistis librum legi* 'you have heard the book read', which does refer to a reading of Job earlier in the service, adding that it was the regular reading on that particular occasion (*qui solemnium munere est decursus et tempore*), that is according to Origen (*In Job*) during the passion week. It would follow that *Ep.* 76 was written just before Easter, but not *Ep.* 75a. The evidence that 75a was written in January or early February 386, and well before 76, remains overwhelming, see above p. 128.

2 Ambrose works out the parallel with Job more fully in *Ep.* 76.14–16.

3 This was presumably after Ambrose had been accused of misuse of church property for seditious purposes (see c. 33 below) after he had broken up and smelted sacred vessels, as he says, to redeem captives. See Ambrose, *De off.* 2.28.

4 *Eph.* 6.12.

athlete or a man skilled in some other noble art, it is eager to submit him to a contest. Why do you reject in a matter of greater importance, something which in lesser circumstances you are in the habit of wanting? Neither weapons nor barbarians inspire fear in a man who is not afraid of death, who is not held back by the inclinations¹ of the flesh.

7. Clearly, if the Lord has chosen me for this contest, it is in vain for you to keep watch so many days and nights without sleep. The will of Christ will be fulfilled. For our Lord Jesus is omnipotent. That is what we believe;² and therefore whatever he ordains will be fulfilled, and it is not for you to obstruct the divine purpose.

8. You have heard today's reading. The Saviour ordered that the foal of an ass should be brought to him by the apostles, and instructed them that if anybody objected they were to say: *The Lord has need of it.*³ But what are Christ's instructions if he has at this present moment ordered that famous *foal of an ass*, in other words an animal which regularly carries heavy burdens, which is also the condition of the men to whom the following words are addressed: *Come to me all you who labour and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is light?*⁴ What – I am asking you – [are his instructions] if he has at this moment ordered the foal to be brought to him, and has sent out those same apostles, who having shed their bodies, have assumed the likeness of angels invisible to our eyes? If anyone were to object, because, for example, love of this life motivated their refusal, or inertia of flesh and blood, or even human affection,⁵ for it does seem that there may perhaps be some people here who are fond of me, [his instructions would surely still be] that they were to say *the Lord has need of it*. But anyone among you who loves me, would show his love much more, if he would allow me to be a sacrifice for Christ. For *to depart, and be with Christ, is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary, on your account.*⁶ So there

1 *Voluntas* = Greek *epithumia*. See Mohrmann 1965, 103.

2 Ambrose has slipped in a bit of Catholic and anti-*Homoian* teaching. On the *Homoians* see above p. 8.

3 Lk. 19.31. In this involved sentence Ambrose argues that if God should demand that he becomes a martyr, he himself must be ready; and the congregation which has been protecting him should allow him to go, just as the people approached for a foal by the apostles at Jerusalem were to told to give it 'because the Lord has need for it'.

4 Mt. 11.28–30. In this context the burden and the yoke are martyrdom.

5 Free translation of *conversatio corporalis*, meaning the affection which might make some unwilling to allow Ambrose to offer himself to be martyred.

6 Phil. 1.23–24.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 147

is nothing for you to fear, dearly beloved brethren. For I know that whatever I will suffer, I suffer for Christ. And I have read that I ought not to fear those who can kill the flesh,¹ and I have heard Christ say: *He who loses his life for my sake will find it.*²

9. And so, if the Lord wills, it is certain that nobody will be able to stand in the way. But if he still delays our contest, what do you fear? It is normal for a servant of Christ to be fortified not by a bodyguard but by the providence of the Lord.

10. You are worried because you found the double-doors open which a certain blind man is said to have opened while making his way back to his lodging. Learn from this that human vigilance is of no avail. See how a single man, who had lost his faculty of sight, threw open your entire defences, and made a mockery of your watch. But the Lord has not withdrawn his merciful watchfulness. Was it not two days ago, as you remember, that a certain entrance on the left side of the basilica was found to be open, an entrance, which you thought had been shut and secured? Armed men did indeed surround the basilica,³ and they tried out entrances on this side and that; but they were overcome by blindness so that they were unable to see what was open. But you have been well aware of what has been open for several nights. Therefore you must stop worrying. For that which Christ orders will come to pass, and it will be for the best.

11. To demonstrate this I will offer you examples taken from the Law.⁴ Elisha was being pursued by the king of Syria. An army had been sent to capture him. He was surrounded on all sides. His servant lad⁵ began to be afraid – because he was a servant lad – that is, he did not have freedom of thought and action. The holy prophet prayed that the boy's eyes should be opened, and he said: *Look and see how many more are with us than against us,*⁶ and the boy looked and saw thousands of angels. So you can see that those we cannot see give greater protection to the servants of Christ than those we can see. But notice too that if invisible guardians are watching over you, they are watching because they have been summoned by your prayers. For, as you surely have read, the men who were hunting down Elisha

1 Mt. 10.28.

2 Mt. 10.39.

3 Cf. also c. 15.

4 *Lex* = the Old Testament.

5 *Servulus*, in the Vulgate, *puer*, boy, i.e. slave.

6 Freely cited after Vulgate 4 Kg. 6.16 (= 2 Kg. 6.16 in RSV).

crossed into Samaria, to reach the man whom they were keen to take prisoner; but not only were they unable to do him any harm, but they themselves were saved by the intercession of the very man they had come against.

12. Let the apostle Peter also provide an example of each situation.¹ For when Herod had sought him and arrested him, he put him in prison. For the servant of God had not withdrawn into hiding, but had stood his ground, not knowing the meaning of fear. The Church prayed for him. But the Apostle was asleep in prison, which is proof of fearlessness. An angel was sent to awake him as he slept. By that angel Peter was led out of the prison, and evaded death for the moment.²

13. Later the same Peter, after he had overcome Simon Magus,³ when he was sowing the commandments of God among the people, and teaching them chaste living,⁴ he stirred up the anger of the pagans. When these were seeking him, Christian souls entreated Peter to withdraw for a while. And although Peter was eager for martyrdom,⁵ he was swayed nevertheless by the thought of the people pleading with him, for he was being asked to preserve himself for the instruction and strengthening of the people. To come to the point,⁶ one night he started to slip out through the walls, and seeing Christ coming towards him through the gate, and going into the city, Peter said: 'Lord, where are you going?' Christ replied: 'I am coming to be crucified once more'. Peter understood that the divine reply referred to his own cross; for Christ could not be crucified a second time, seeing that he had discarded his physical body with the suffering of his voluntary death: *The death he died, he died once and for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.*⁷ Peter understood that Christ would have to be crucified a second time in the body of his servant, and so he willingly turned back. And when the Christians questioned him he gave them the reason. He was arrested immediately, and on the cross, paid homage to⁸ the Lord Jesus.

1 Ambrose refers back to cc. 8 and 9: God may either demand or postpone martyrdom. Peter (in the incident from Acts) was first saved from martyrdom, and later called to be a martyr.

2 Acts 12.3–10.

3 Acts 8.18; Eusebius, *HE* 2.14.

4 *Cum doceret castimoniam.*

5 *Cupidus passionis.*

6 For the following anecdote see *Actus Petri cum Simone (vel Actus Vercellenses)*, ed. Lipsius-Bonnet I.45–103. *Acts of Peter*, in the Apocryphal New Testament, ed. and trans. M. R. James, Oxford 1924, 332–33.

7 Rom. 6.10: *peccato*, to sin, was omitted by Ambrose.

8 *Honorificavit*, this and other verbs formed with -ficare are a feature of Christian Latin, Mohrmann 1965, 211–12.

14. So you can see that it is Christ's will to suffer in his humble servants. What if he is (now) saying also to this humble servant:¹ *It is my will that he remains, but you follow me*,² and that he wishes to taste the fruit of this (particular) tree?³ After all, as it was *his food to perform the will of his father*,⁴ so it is also his food to be nourished by our sufferings.⁵ We must therefore surely accept the precedent since it was set by our Lord himself, who when he willed it did suffer, and when he was sought he was found; but when the hour for suffering had not yet come, he passed through the midst of those looking for him, and though they saw him they could not hold him?⁶ What this clearly shows is that when it is the Lord's will, any one of us will be found, and arrested, but when he wills postponement, even though the hunters catch sight of their quarry, they will not seize it.

15. Have I not been in the habit of going out every day, going to visit people, or going to martyrs' tombs?⁷ Have I not gone close to the imperial residence, both going and coming back? And yet nobody grabbed hold of me, even though they had it in mind to drive me out, as they revealed later, saying what they wanted: 'Leave the city and go wherever you wish to'. I must admit that I was anticipating some momentous outcome,⁸ either fire or sword on behalf of the name of Christ, but instead of suffering these people offered me amusement, though the athlete of Christ does not demand amusement, but pain. So do not let anybody upset you, because they have

1 This humble servant is Ambrose.

2 Shortened from Jn 21, 22. The risen Christ orders the apostle John to remain and (by implication) to write his Gospel, and Peter to 'follow' in the sense of 'feeding my sheep', and eventually to suffer martyrdom. The citation shows that though it is Christ's will that his followers should suffer, it is not the only thing he wants them to do, and in any case only at the right time. Ambrose is arguing that at that moment it was his duty to 'remain', though he was ready to 'follow' whenever the time was right. This reasoning is not fully set out in our text. Perhaps Ambrose dwelt a little longer on the passage when he spoke the sermon.

3 Christ wishes to taste the fruit of this tree (i.e. Ambrose) in accordance with his saying 'For each tree is known by its fruit' (Lk. 6.44).

4 Jn 4.34; but 'the will of the father' is also to be interpreted with reference to Mk 14.36: 'remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what thou wilt'.

5 This argument is made more difficult to follow because it is partly set out in biblical citations using metaphors whose reference and relevance are not fully explained.

6 Cf. Lk. 4.30.

7 Cf. Ambrose, *Hymn* 11 on the older martyrs buried at Milan: Victor, Nabor and Felix.

8 Literally 'great thing'.

prepared a carriage for me,¹ or what they think are harsh threats, flung out by the tongue of Auxentius, who calls himself bishop.²

16. Many people were saying that assassins have been sent out, and the death penalty decreed. I have no fear of that, nor will I desert my post. After all, where could I go where I would not find a profusion of groans and tears, when the order has gone out to all churches that Catholic bishops are to be expelled, to be pierced with sword if they resist, that all city councillors³ are to be indicted, unless they carry out the decree?⁴ And all this written by the hand, and dictated by the mouth, of a bishop, who in order to demonstrate his great learning has not failed to invoke an ancient precedent. For we read in a prophet that he once saw a flying sickle.⁵ Imitating this, Auxentius has sent a sword flying through all the cities. And *Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*,⁶ and imitates his power, in order to do evil.

17. You, Lord Jesus, have redeemed the world in an instant, (and) in an instant Auxentius will destroy as many peoples as are within his power, some by the sword, others by sacrilege. From me he demands the basilica, with gory lips and bloodstained hands. Today's reading gives him an apt reply: *But to the sinner God says: 'what right have you to recite my statutes?'*⁷ That is to say, there is no common ground between peace and frenzy, no compromise between Christ and Belial.⁸ You will also remember from today's reading that Naboth, a holy man and owner of a vineyard, was harassed by a royal demand that he should give away the vineyard, so that the king could cut down the vines and plant some cheap vegetables, and that Naboth replied:

1 See Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 12: one Euthymius is said to have planned to seize Ambrose and to cart him off into exile.

2 Subsequently we hear more about the supposedly bloodthirsty legislation for which Auxentius is said to be responsible. It can hardly be anything other than *CTh* 16.1.4 of 23 January 386, which gave freedom of assembly to those who followed the faith as defined in Arian councils, and threatened with charge of treason and the death penalty those who would 'turbulently' challenge it.

3 'City councillors' translates *curiales*, often described as decurions, the members of a city council (*curia*), who were collectively responsible for law and order in their city, and for the enforcement of laws like this one.

4 *Mandatum*, in fact only a proposal of the Arian bishop, or rather an alleged proposal.

5 *Falcem*, Zech. 5.2, 'sickle' as in Septuagint. The Vulgate has *volumen* and the RSV translates 'scroll'.

6 2 Cor. 11.14.

7 *Quare tu enarras iustitias meas*, Ps. 50.16 (Vulg. 49.16).

8 Cf. 2 Cor. 6.15.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 151

*far be it that I hand over the inheritance of my fathers.*¹ The king, we are told, was aggrieved because what was legally another's had been refused him, though the refusal was perfectly legal. But the king, misled by a woman's trick,² came into possession of the vineyard as a result of the death of Naboth. For the holy Naboth defended his vines even with his blood. If Naboth did not hand over his vineyard, shall we hand over the Church of Christ?

18. What then did I reply 'contumaciously'?³ Summoned, I proceeded to say: 'Far be it from me that I should hand over the inheritance of my fathers. If Naboth did not hand over the inheritance of his fathers, was I to hand over the inheritance of Christ?' But I also added the following: 'Far be it from me to hand over the inheritance of my fathers, that is the inheritance of Dionysius⁴ who died in exile in the cause of the faith, the inheritance of Eustorgius,⁵ the confessor, the inheritance of Mirocletis,⁶ and of all the faithful bishops of former days'. I answered as is proper for a bishop, let the emperor act as is proper for an emperor. It is better that he should take away my life than my faith.

19. And to whom am I being asked to hand it over? Today's reading from the gospel ought to teach us what is being demanded, and by whom it is demanded. Doubtless you heard in today's reading how when Christ was riding on the foal of an ass the children⁷ kept shouting aloud, and the Jews⁸ were becoming angry.⁹ Finally they addressed the Lord Jesus, saying that he should make the people keep quiet. He replied: *If these should*

1 Translates *absit ut*. But RSV 1 Kg. 21.3 reads *the lord forgive*. Vulg. 3 Kg. 21.3: *propitius mihi sit deus*/may god be gracious to me!

2 A hint that now too a woman shares the responsibility, that is Justina, the emperor's Arian mother.

3 'Contumaciously', showing contempt for the recent pro-Arian law (*CTh* 16.1.4).

4 Bishop of Milan from c. 351, who was exiled in 355 after the council of Milan because he refused to subscribe to the condemnation of Athanasius. He died in exile c. 361. Ambrose praises him in *Ep. ex.* 14.68–70. See also Athanasius, *Hist. Ar.* 33–35; Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius*, *CSEL* 65.1, Vienna 1916, 186ff, translated Wickham 1997, 69; Rufinus, *HE* 10.21; Socrates, *HE* 2.36.

5 Bishop of Milan 344–c. 350.

6 Also known as Mirocles, the bishop of Milan who attended councils of Rome (313) and Arles (314). See Optatus of Milevis, *Libri septem*, *CSEL* 26, 1.23.

7 *Pueruli*, children. In c. 20 Ambrose describes their song as a fulfilment of Ps. 8.2, but the Vulgate of Lk. 19.37 has *turbae discipulorum*/crowds of pupils (disciples) and Lk. 19.39 *discipulos tuos*/your pupils (disciples).

8 In the Vulgate, Lk. 19.39 has *quidam Phariseorum*/certain Pharisees.

9 Lk. 19.37–39.

*be silent the stones will cry out.*¹ Then entering the temple he threw out the money-changers and those selling seats and doves in the temple of God. That reading was recited not by deliberate arrangement of mine, but by chance. Yet it is well fitted to our present circumstances. For the praises of Christ have always been the scourge of the unbelievers. And today whenever Christ is being praised the heretics say that sedition is being stirred up, the heretics say that with these words one becomes liable to the death penalty.² And the praises of Christ do indeed mean death for them. For how possibly can they bear the praises of him, whose weakness they are proclaiming? And so even today when Christ is praised the madness of the Arians is scourged.

20. The Gerasenes could not bear the presence of Christ.³ These people who are worse than the Gerasenes cannot even tolerate praise of Christ. They see children singing the glory of Christ – because it is written *out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected your praise*.⁴ They mock their tender age, so full of faith, when they say: *what are they crying out about?* But Christ answers them: *If these should be silent the stones will cry out*,⁵ that means those stronger than infants will cry out. The young will cry out, adults will cry out, even old people will cry out, those stones already solidly fastened to the one of whom it is written *the stone which the builders rejected has been made the head of the corner*.⁶

21. And so, enticed by these acclamations, Christ enters his temple, and takes up a scourge, and drives the money-changers out of the temple. For he does not allow slaves of money in his temple. He does not allow people who sell seats in his temple.⁷ For what do the seats stand for if not offices of honour?⁸ And what do the doves stand for if not simple minds, or souls following a clear and pure faith? Am I really to bring back into the temple someone whom Christ has excluded? After all the command to get out applies

1 Lk. 19.40.

2 The translation relates this sentence to the penalty threatened in the recent law for anyone who infringes the *Homoians*' right to assemble.

3 Lk. 8.37.

4 Ps. 8.2 (Vulg. 8.3), Mt. 21.16.

5 Lk. 19.40.

6 Ps. 118.22 (Vulg. 117.22).

7 Vulg. Jn. 2.15 has tables not seats: *mensas subvertit*, and they are the tables of the money-changers.

8 *Honores* = public offices, magistracies, but Ambrose is thinking particularly of the sale of church-offices. He is implying that Auxentius has been guilty of simony.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 153

to anyone who sells public dignities and offices, the command to get out applies to anyone who wants to sell the simple minds of the faithful.

22. That is why Auxentius is driven out, that is why Mercurinus is excluded.¹ This is a single monster with two names. For in order that it should not be recognised who he was, he changed his name. Because there had been here at Milan one Auxentius, an Arian bishop,² he called himself Auxentius in order to deceive that man's flock. So he changed his name, but he did not change his unbelief.³ He takes off one set of wolf's clothing and puts on another set of wolf's clothing. It does him no good that he has changed his name. He is recognised for what he is. He used to have one name in the Scythian region,⁴ he is called something else here: his name changes with his domicile. So he has two names already, and if he should migrate from here to somewhere else, he will have a third. For how will he bear to retain a name which is evidence against him of so great a crime? He did less in Scythia, yet he was so ashamed that he changed his name. He has perpetrated worse crimes here, so no matter where he goes, will he want his name to give him away? Can one who by his own signature and writing sheds the blood of so many people ever be at ease with himself?

23. The Lord Jesus excluded a few individuals from his temple. Auxentius left no one. Jesus used a scourge to expel men from his temple, Auxentius a sword, Mercurinus an axe.⁵ The pious Lord shifted the sacrilegious with a scourge, this worthless man persecutes the pious with the steel.⁶ You⁷ spoke well when you said about him today: 'Let him take his laws away with him!' He will take them away with him, even though he does not want to. He will take his guilt, even if he takes no written document. He will take his soul inscribed in blood, even if he does not take a letter written in ink. *Your sin,*

1 There is no independent evidence to check Ambrose's claim that Auxentius had changed his name from Mercurinus. Auxentius is almost certainly identical with bishop Auxentius of Durostorum, modern Silistra in Bulgaria. He is author of the *epistula de vita Ulfilae/Letter on the Life of Ulfila*, of which a translation is found in P. Heather and J. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, TTH 11, Liverpool 1991, 145–53.

2 Auxentius was appointed after the deposition of Dionysius in 355 and was bishop until his death in 374. See McLynn 1994, 20–31, 36–37; Williams 1995, 76–83, 86–88.

3 *Perfidia*.

4 Durostorum was on the Danube.

5 *Securis*, a barbarian weapon. At Durostorum the secular arm was represented by Goths.

6 Lit. 'iron', *ferro*, i.e. with a sword.

7 You, in plural; Ambrose is recalling an acclamation made by his congregation.

*Judah, is written with a pen of iron, and with a point of diamond it is engraved in your heart,*¹ that means it is inscribed there where it originated.

24. Does he even have the effrontery to talk to me of debate, when he is covered with blood and gore? He thinks that all those he fails to mislead with words ought to be slain with the sword. With his mouth he dictates, with his hand he writes bloodthirsty laws, thinking that men can be commanded by legislation to adopt a faith. He has not heard even that passage which was read today: *Since man is not justified by works of the law*, the apostle declares, *through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God*.² Paul means that by the law of the spirit he is dead to the physical interpretation of the law. We too by the law of our Lord Jesus Christ are to be dead to this present law, which sanctions decrees of unbelief.³ It was not law, but faith in Christ that formed the assembly of the Church. For the law has not come about through faith, but *the just man lives through faith*.⁴ Faith, then, and not law, makes the just man, because justice does not exist through the law, but through faith in Christ. He, however, who rejects faith and prescribes articles of law, testifies that he is unjust, because *the just man lives through faith*.

25. Should anyone therefore accept the law which endorses the Council of Rimini, at which it was declared that Christ had been created?⁵ But they cite: *God sent forth his son, made of woman, made under the law*.⁶ So they construe *was made* to mean 'was created'. They surely realise, in the passage they have quoted, that Christ is not only said to have been made, but *made of a woman*, meaning in as far as he was born of a virgin; but as regards his divine generation he was begotten of the Father. And even today they have read: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become accursed for us*.⁷ Was Christ really a 'curse' as regards his divinity? But the apostle teaches you why Christ is called 'accursed': *For it is written, 'Accursed be every one who hangs on a tree'*,⁸ which means that he who in his flesh bore our flesh, in his

1 Jer. 17.1. *Your sin*: in the Vulgate this is in the third person.

2 Gal. 2.16, 19.

3 *Perfidia*, in Christian usage: disbelief, unbelief, heresy.

4 Gal. 3.11.

5 The decisions of the *Homoian* council of AD 359, confirmed and enforced by Constantius II.

6 Gal. 4.4.

7 Gal. 3.13.

8 Gal. 3.13; Deut. 21.23.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 155

body bore our infirmities and our curses, to crucify them. For he was not cursed himself but he was cursed in you. Finally, you have another passage: *for our sake he was made to be a sin, who knew no sin*,¹ for he took upon himself our sins in order to destroy them through the mystery of his passion

26. These issues, brethren, I would gladly discuss at greater length with him in your presence face to face, but being certain that you know your faith, he shuns examination by you, and has chosen pagans to be his arbitrators,³ some four or five, if indeed he has chosen any.² I could wish that these men were present in the congregation with all of us, not in order to pronounce judgement on Christ, but to hear of⁴ Christ's majesty. Those individuals have, in fact, already given their verdict on Auxentius, whom they have not believed, though he has been putting his case to them day after day. How could his condemnation be more conclusive? For he was actually defeated before his preferred judges, without the opposing party being present. So now we have obtained their verdict as well against Auxentius.

27. He is also to be justly condemned for choosing pagans, because he has disregarded the apostle's commands: *When one of you has grievance against a brother, does he dare to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge this world?* And later he declares: *'Can it be that there is not one among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?'*⁵ You see that what he has introduced is against the authority of the apostle. You must choose whether we should follow Auxentius or Paul as our master!

28. But why am I speaking about the apostle, when the Lord himself proclaims through the prophet: *Hearken unto me, my people, who have judgement*,⁶ *in whose heart is my law*?⁷ God says: *Hearken unto me, my people, who have judgement*. Auxentius says: 'You do not have judgement'. Do

1 2 Cor. 5.21.

2 *Cognitores*.

3 'If indeed he has chosen any' (Zelzer's text) is problematic. *Ep.* 75.1 and 6 state that Ambrose has not been told their names. Is that why he is uncertain whether Auxentius has indeed chosen any? But he knows that there are four or five, and that they are pagans. So he is not uncertain. Perhaps the text should read 'Si tamen aliquos elegit eos vellem adesse in coetu omnium?' or 'quos si tamen elegit vellem ...', translating: 'If indeed he has chosen them, I would wish ...'

4 Literally 'to hear'.

5 1 Cor. 6.1ff. and 6.5ff.

6 *Qui scitis iudicium*, which RSV translates 'who know righteousness'.

7 Is. 51.7; 'righteousness' translates *iudicium*. Vulgate has *iustum*.

you see that he is treating God with contempt, when by rejecting you, he rejects the voice of the heavenly oracle? The prophet says: *Hearken unto me my people, says the Lord*, he does not say 'hearken ye pagans'. He does not say: 'hearken ye Jews'. For the people of the Jews is no longer the people of God which it was, because it has become the people of error, and what was the people of error has begun to be the people of God, because it has come to believe in Christ. It is that people which judges in whose heart there resides a law that is divine and not human, *written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God*,¹ not inscribed on paper but stamped on the heart,² the law of grace not of blood. So who is the one who does you wrong? Is it he who refuses, or not rather he who chooses to be heard by you?

29. Fenced in on all sides, Auxentius seeks refuge in the cunning of his fathers.³ He sets out to arouse the hostility of the emperor against me. He says that the judge should be a catechumen, ignorant of the Holy Scriptures, and that the hearing should be in the consistory. The argument he advances is that last year⁴ I had been summoned to the palace to a discussion in the consistory in the presence of the leading officials, because the emperor was seeking to seize the basilica. [He claims] that I had then been intimidated by the sight of the imperial court, and not maintained the firmness proper for a bishop. I had thus left the palace with my rights diminished.⁵ Surely they remember, that when the people found out that I had made for the palace, they surged forward so violently that their rush could not be checked as they threw themselves at the general⁶ who had come out with light-armed troops to disperse them; for they were ready to die for their faith in Christ. In that situation, was it not I who was asked to placate the people with a long speech, to give a pledge that nobody would invade the basilica of the Church? And even

1 2 Cor. 3.3.

2 *Exarata ... signata*: homoioteleuton, that is successive clauses with rhyming endings. This figure of speech, which is common in literary late Latin (for instance in Augustine's *Confessions*) occurs rarely in these letters.

3 Who are the 'fathers' whose cunning Auxentius is employing? Perhaps he is referring to the procedure by which in 364 the *Homoian* Arian Auxentius had fought off an attempt of Hilary of Poitiers to depose him. See Williams 1995, 78–79.

4 McLynn 1994, 174, argues that this was at Easter 385, and that the emperor then asked for a church where he would attend a *Homoian* Easter service, as he was to ask again at Easter 386.

5 Auxentius' argument probably is that by agreeing to discuss church business in the consistory in 385 Ambrose had created a precedent which should be followed now.

6 *Comes militaris*, probably one of the commanders of the field army units that were stationed near the court, like the *comes* Rumoridus in *Ep. ex.* 10.3, conceivably that man himself, cf. *PLRE* 1.786, s.v. Flavius Rumoridus.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 157

though my services had been demanded to do them a favour, nevertheless the fact that the people had advanced towards the palace was used to arouse ill-will against me. Now they want to revive this ill-will.

30. I did draw the people away, but did not escape ill-will nevertheless. But this kind of displeasure is, I think something to be conciliated rather than feared. After all, what should we fear when defending Christ's name? Unless perhaps this point ought to move me, that they can say: 'Ought not the emperor be given one basilica to attend in state,¹ and does Ambrose want to have more power than the emperor, that he refuses him the opportunity of appearing in state?'² When they say this, they intend to exploit my words, like the Jews who tried to catch out Jesus with cunning words, saying: *Teacher, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*³ Is Caesar's ill-will to be forever stirred up against the servants of God? And will impiety always further its campaign of slander by the trick of sheltering behind the imperial name? And can the Arians deny that they share the sacrilege of those whose teaching they follow?⁴

31. But see how much worse the Arians are than the Jews. The latter were asking whether he thought that the lawful tribute ought to be paid to Caesar, whereas the former are willing to hand over to the emperor the rights of the Church. But as the unbelievers⁵ follow their founder, so let us also reply with the teaching of our Lord and founder: Seeing through the trick of the Jews, Jesus said to them: *'Why put me to the test? Show me a denarius!'*⁶ And when they had given him one, he said: *'Whose image and inscription is this?'* and replying, they said: *'Caesar's'*. And he said to them: *'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'* So I too say to those who oppose me: *'Show me a denarius'*. Surely it cannot be that when they occupy basilicas belonging to the Church, they are offering his *denarius* to Caesar?

32. But so far as the Church is concerned I know only one image, that is the image of the invisible God,⁷ with reference to which God said: *Let us*

1 Translates *ad quem procedat*.

2 I take both *procedere* and *prodire* to refer to a procession of emperor and attendants to a church service.

3 Mt. 22.18–21.

4 That is, the Jews.

5 *Perfidi*.

6 The standard Roman silver coin, worth much more than the 'penny', which is its translation in most English versions of the Bible. The Vulgate reads *nomisma census*, tax-money.

7 By association Ambrose turns from the emperor's image on the coin to that of God, which is also that of the Trinity.

*make man in our image and after our likeness.*¹ That is the image of which it is written: Christ, *the splendour of his glory and the image of his substance.*² In that image I recognise the Father, as the Lord Jesus himself has said: 'He who sees me, also sees the Father'.³ For that image is not distinct from the Father; and he⁴ has taught me the unity of the Trinity, by saying: *I and the Father are one,*⁵ and further on: *All that the Father has is mine,*⁶ and by saying about the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit is of Christ, and has received from Christ, as the Scripture records: *He will take what is mine and declare it to you.*⁷

33. So then, what have I said in my reply that does not show humility? If he demands tribute I do not refuse. The estates of the Church pay tribute. If the emperor wants the estates he has the power to seize them. None of us is stopping him. The contributions of the people⁸ are amply sufficient for the poor. They would not create ill-will because of the estates. Let them take the estates away, if it pleases the emperor. I am not giving them away, but I am not withholding them either. They ask for gold. I can say: 'I ask for neither silver nor gold'. However, they stir up ill-will against me because gold is being spent.⁹ But that kind of ill-will does not frighten me, I have riches of my own.¹⁰ The poor of Christ are my riches.¹¹ This is a treasure that I know how to amass. I only wish that they may always charge me with expending gold on the poor. But if their charge is that I look to the poor as a bodyguard, I will not repudiate it. I even vaunt it. I do indeed use them as a bodyguard, but my defence lies in their prayers. Though blind and lame, weak and old, they are stronger than vigorous warriors. The fact is that gifts to the poor put God under an obligation to us, for it is written: *He who is generous to the*

1 Gen. 1.26.

2 Hebr. 1.3. For *imago substantiae*, Vulg. has *figura substantia*. For Ambrose, though obviously not for the author of the epistle, this is equivalent to the orthodox *consubstantialis*, and a refutation of Arian definitions.

3 Jn 14.9.

4 Literally 'which' (i.e. the image of God which is Jesus) 'has taught'.

5 Jn 10.30.

6 Jn 16.15.

7 Jn 16.14.

8 *Populus*, as often Ambrose's congregation in Milan.

9 Cf. Ambrose, *De off.* 2.28 (136), cf. 2.15 (71) Presumably the charge was that Ambrose was spending for sedition.

10 *Aerarios*, a play on words: *aerarium*, a treasury, *aerarii*, citizens of a low class.

11 Ambrose, *Hymn* 14, line 24, also *De off.* 2.28 (140). The story was developed by Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 5.

*poor, lends to the Lord.*¹ Bodyguards of warriors frequently fail to win us the grace of God.

34. They assert that the people have also been deceived by the spells² of my hymns.³ I am obviously not denying that. They are indeed a mighty enchantment. There is nothing more powerful. For what is more powerful than the glorification⁴ of the Trinity which is celebrated day after day by the voices of the whole people? All eagerly vie with one another to confess the Faith. All know how to praise in verses Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So they have all become teachers, whereas earlier they were scarcely pupils.

35. How therefore can we show more obedience than by following the example of Christ, who being *found in human form, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death*?⁵ Accordingly he has freed all by his obedience: *for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.*⁶ If therefore he was obedient, let them hear the teaching as regards obedience which we observe as we say to those who are provoking the emperor's ill-will against us: *we pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.* Tribute is Caesar's: it is not refused. A church is God's; it certainly ought not to be assigned to Caesar, because a temple of God cannot be under the jurisdiction of Caesar.

36. Nobody can deny that this has been said with due respect for the emperor. For what could show more respect than that the emperor should be called the son of the Church. When this is said, it does not imply sin but confers grace. The emperor is within and not above the Church. For a good

1 Pr. 19.17. 'Is generous to the poor' translates Ambrose's *largitur pauperi*; Vulg. has *miseretur pauperis*/pities the poor.

2 *Carmen* = song/poem, but also spell, and in a context of deceit this meaning is evoked.

3 On the introduction to the West by Ambrose of hymn-singing see J. Fontaine, *Ambroise de Milan: Hymnes*, Paris 1992. The present passage shows that the first episode of congregational hymn-singing must have been significantly earlier than the sermon, early enough to have become part of the accusations from which Ambrose is defending himself now. It follows that the present siege either was not the first siege, or the siege amounted to a long-drawn-out and intermittent affair, a device for exerting sustained pressure which had started some time, probably a considerable time, before the law of January 376.

4 *Confessio*: see Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 117.1; *confessio est aut laudantis aut paenitentis* / confession is either an act of praise or of penitence. See Mohrmann 1965, 54, 185, 208–09. Here 'glorification' involves a declaration of faith in the whole trinity, as against Arian teaching that only the Father is fully God.

5 Phil. 2.8.

6 Rom. 5.19.

emperor seeks the assistance of the Church, he does not refuse it. I say these things with humility, but I also submit them with steadfastness. But some are threatening fire, the sword, or exile. We the servants of Christ have learnt not to be afraid. To those without fear no alarm is oppressive. As Scripture has it: *Their blows have become arrows of children.*¹

37. An adequate reply would seem to have been given to their proposals. Now I ask them a question which the Saviour himself asked: *Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?*² And the Jews could not answer him. If the Jews did not understand the baptism of John, does Auxentius understand the baptism of Christ? For that baptism is not of men but from heaven, which an angel of great counsel has brought down for us so that we may be justified to God.³ Why therefore does Auxentius think that the faithful are to be rebaptised when they have already been baptised in the name of the Trinity, even though the apostle says: *One Faith one baptism*,⁴ and how can he say that he is the opponent of men and not of Christ, when he treats the counsel of God with contempt, and condemns the baptism which Christ has granted to us for the redemption of our sins?⁵

EPISTULA 76 (MAUR. 20) CONCERNING THE SURRENDER OF THE BASILICA⁶

Introduction

The date and circumstances of the events described in this letter have already been discussed in the Introduction to *Epistulae* 75 to 77.⁷ There remains the problem of distinguishing the churches in which the successive stages of the confrontation between court and bishop took place.⁸ The church outside the walls, the Basilica Portiana which also features in *Ep.* 75a, has been

1 Ps. 64.7 (Vulg. 63.7).

2 Lk. 20.4.

3 Who is the 'angel of great counsel'? Zelzer refers to Is. 9.6: 'His name will be called wonderful, counsellor, mighty God... prince of peace.' That is, Christ.

4 Eph. 4.5.

5 On rebaptism cf. Williams 1995, 159–61, though it is not necessary to accept his argument that *CTh* 16.5.4 was directed exclusively against Donatists.

6 Date: April 386.

7 See above p. 126.

8 MacLynn 1994, 229, fig. 5, shows the location of Milan's churches of the fourth and early fifth centuries.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 161

identified by Krautheimer with the surviving, and very remarkable, San Lorenzo.¹ But this is almost certainly a mistake. Archaeological evidence suggests that San Lorenzo was built in fifth century.² There is a tradition at S. Vittore al Corpo that the Basilica Portiana was a predecessor of the present beautiful baroque church, but this may be a medieval invention. So the Portiana has not yet been identified with certainty. The Nova, the new cathedral, is almost certainly the very large church, later known as S. Tecla, whose remains have been found under the Piazza del Duomo. The Vetus, the old cathedral, is probably the same as the Basilica of the baptistery, and to be identified with the church known as Sta Maria Maggiore in the Middle Ages, whose remains together with those of a baptistery have been found under the present cathedral.³

Throughout the letter Ambrose's use of the word basilica without further epithet has caused commentators to be uncertain in which of the churches a particular episode is taking place. As Ambrose was a highly competent communicator we can assume that his use of language is consistent, and was unambiguous for the intended readers. In this translation and its notes it has been assumed that unless it is made explicit that the reference is to another building, basilica refers to the church where Ambrose is preaching, that is, in all but one case, to the then cathedral of Milan, the Nova, later known as San Tecla. The exception is in chapter 13 where the basilica is the Vetus, the old cathedral, where Ambrose was at that time holding a service because the Nova has been occupied by soldiers. A reference to the Nova in the same chapter makes it absolutely clear that this is not the church where Ambrose was at that time.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 76 (MAUR. 20)

<Ambrose to his sister Marcellina>.

1. Since in almost all your letters you enquire anxiously about the state of the Church, listen to what is going on. The day after I received your letter in

1 R. Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals: Rome, Constantinople, Milan*, Berkeley/London 1983, 88–89.

2 M. P. Rossignani, 'I materiali architettonici di reimpiego', in G. A. Dell'Acqua (ed.), *La basilica di San Lorenzo in Milano*, Milan 1985, 39–63.

3 Humphries 1999, 198 fig. 5, shows the two churches and baptisteries found respectively in front of and under the present cathedral.

which you revealed that your dreams were disturbing you, a mass of grave anxieties was set in motion. The demand now was not just for the Portiana, that is a church outside the walls, but for the New Basilica, one which is within the walls, and larger.

2. The first thing was that some men of <illustrious rank>,¹ counts of the imperial consistory,² met me with the demand that I should both surrender³ the basilica,⁴ and see to it that the people⁵ did not cause any disturbance. I replied, correctly, that a temple belonging to God cannot be handed over by a bishop.

3. The following day there was an acclamation⁶ of support in the church.⁷ No less a man than the praetorian prefect⁸ arrived there. He started to urge us to withdraw at least from the Portian Basilica. The people protested. We parted, with the prefect saying that he would report to the emperor.

4. On the following day, which happened to be a Sunday,⁹ after the lessons and the sermon, when I had sent away the catechumens, I was teaching the Creed¹⁰ to a number of candidates for baptism in the basilica of the baptistery.¹¹ There I received the report that as soon as it became known that they had sent palace officials¹² to the Basilica Portiana, and that they were putting up imperial hangings,¹³ a section of the people began to flock there. I stuck to my duty, however, and began to celebrate mass.¹⁴

5. While I was making the offering, I learnt that the people had made a prisoner of some man called Castulus, whom the Arians call a priest. They

1 Illustrious rank, the rank of the counts of the consistory. But *illustres* is Zelzer's emendation.

2 See Glossary and Jones 1964, 333–41.

3 *Traderem*: as Ambrose presents it, he is required to commit *traditio*, like martyrs in the Great Persecution ordered to hand over copies of the sacred writings.

4 I take that to be Ambrose's cathedral, the new church or Nova.

5 *Populus*, a word often used by Ambrose to describe members of his congregation.

6 *Acclamatio*: a technical term for a rhythmical proclamation by an assembly, whether the senate, or the spectators in a theatre or hippodrome, or a congregation, as here.

7 *Ecclesia*, i.e. in Ambrose's church, the Nova.

8 On the office of this, the highest of civil officials, see Glossary. The holder at the time was Flavius Eusignius, see *PLRE* 1.309–10.

9 Palm Sunday.

10 *Symbolum*.

11 That is, the old church, the Vetus.

12 *Decani*.

13 In preparation for a service which would be attended by the emperor.

14 The earliest use of *missa* in the sense of mass (Mohrmann 1965, 368).

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 163

happened to have come across him in the street on their way.¹ Right in the middle of the offertory I started to weep bitter tears, and to beg God to come to our aid, and prevent anyone's blood being shed in an ecclesiastical dispute, or at least that it was my blood which would be shed, not only for the salvation of the people, but also on behalf of the Arians themselves. In short: I sent priests and deacons, and had the fellow snatched out of harm's way.

6. Thereupon very severe penalties were decreed, in the first place against the whole corporation of traders.² And so during the holy days of the last week of Lent, a time when by custom debtors are freed from their shackles,³ there was a loud rattle of chains, chains being hung around the neck of people who have done nothing. Two hundred pounds by weight of gold was demanded, the entire sum to be paid within three days. Their response was that they would give as much again, or double if that were demanded, provided only they were allowed to keep their faith. The prisons were full of traders.

7. All the members of the Palatine departments, that is the *memoriales*,⁴ the *agentes in rebus*, the subordinate officials of various counts, were under orders to abstain from appearing in public, on the ostensible grounds of being kept from involvement in a seditious assembly. The notables⁵ were threatened with many and grave consequences unless they surrendered the basilica.⁶ Persecution was raging, and it seemed that if they got the gate opened, they would break into every kind of atrocity.

8. I myself was being pressed by the counts and tribunes to agree to an immediate handover of the basilica.⁷ They said that the emperor was

1 The context shows that they were on their way to the Basilica Portiana.

2 *Corpus mercatorum*: see J. P. Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains*, Louvain 1885–1900, 2.139; L. Ruggini, *Economia e società nell'Italia annonaria. Rapporti fra agricoltura e commercio dal IV al VI secolo d.C.*, Milan 1961, 107ff.

3 *CTh* 9.38.3, 4.

4 Their chief of department had opposed the law, Sozomen, *HE* 7.13; Rufinus, *HE* 2.16.

5 *Honorati*: men who have held high-ranking office in the imperial administration. See Jones 1964, 366–73, 578–82, 574–77 and the Glossary.

6 From this point the demand is no longer for the Portiana, but for the Nova. Evidently the riot described in c. 5 hardened the attitude of the government, so that it now demanded the new centrally placed cathedral, instead of the church in a suburb which was being defended by a sit-in of its congregation. There are no further references to the Portiana. McLynn 1994, 190ff., argues that the subsequent conflict was still to be about the Portiana, mistakenly in the view taken here.

7 The Nova.

exercising his legal rights, since all things were subject to his authority. I replied that if he was after what belongs to me, that is my land, my money, any right,¹ no matter what, that was mine, I would not resist – even though everything of mine really belongs to the poor. But the things that are God's, I insisted, were not subject to the power of the emperor. 'If my family property is what is wanted, come and take it; if my person, I will offer it. Do you want to drag me off to prison? Or to execution? I am ready. I will not surround myself with a defensive wall of my people, nor will I cling to the altar, begging for my life: much more gladly, in defending the altar, I will become a sacrifice.'

9. Yes, I was terrified when I learned that military men had been sent to seize the basilica of the Church, for I feared that their appropriation of the basilica would be accompanied by carnage, which would result in the ruin of the city as a whole. I kept praying that I might not survive the cremation² of so great a city, perhaps of all Italy. I shrank from the odium of being the cause of bloodshed. I offered my own throat. Some tribunes of the Goths were standing close by. I assailed them saying: 'Was it for this that the Roman Empire admitted you, that you should offer yourselves as agents for the promotion of civil strife? To where will you emigrate if this region is destroyed?'³

10. I was called upon to pacify the people. I replied that it was in my power not to rouse them, but to pacify them lay with God. After all, if the emperor really believed that I was the instigator, he ought to have me punished straight away, or to have me transported to whatever desolate part of the world he pleased. On my saying this, they departed. I spent the whole day in the Old Basilica.⁴ From there I took myself home, to rest, so that if anybody wished to deport me he would find me ready.

11. The next morning before dawn just as I had set foot outside my doorstep, the basilica⁵ was occupied by the troops that had surrounded it.

1 *Ius*.

2 *Bustum*.

3 There were at this time many Goths, both officers and men in the Roman army. See P. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, Oxford 1991, especially 123–28, 158–65 (admission of Goths), 340–41 (Justina and the Goths).

4 If as is likely the interview with the officials and the Goths took place inside, or just outside Ambrose's cathedral, he did not remain there to see it being occupied, but immediately abandoned it for the nearby Vetus, where we find him immediately after.

5 This is the Nova. The threat made the previous day was now being carried out. The bishop's residence was presumably close to the cathedral, as it is today. So Ambrose saw the occupation as he left his front door.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 165

The word was that the military enjoined on the emperor that if he wished to come out¹ (to attend church), he would have the opportunity. They themselves, however, would attend him only if they saw that he was associating with the Catholics² otherwise they would go over to the crowd called by Ambrose.³

12. Not one of the Arians was brave enough to come out,⁴ since there were none of the citizens there, a few from the imperial household, and a number of Goths.⁵ At one time wagons were homes to these people, so now their wagon is the church. Wherever that woman makes her way she drags with her a swarm of followers.⁶

13. I could tell from the groans of the people that the church⁷ was surrounded. But during the reading of the lesson word was brought to me that the Basilica Nova too was filling up with our people; the crowd seemed bigger than when they had not been under duress;⁸ a shout had gone up for a Reader. To be brief: the very soldiers who appeared to have taken possession of the basilica, learning that I had given instruction that they were to be kept from joining the congregation in the Eucharist, started to come here to our service. At the sight of them there was panic among the women; one of them rushed forward. The soldiers themselves, however, were declaring that they had come to prayer, not to battle. The people raised a cheer. They kept demanding – with such restraint, with such steadfastness, with such loyalty

1 *Prodire*, 'to come out', is used by Ambrose to describe the emperor's proceeding to church also in *Ep.* 76.27, *Ep.* 75a.30 and that of the Arians in *Ep.* 76.12.

2 The implication is that the soldiers have occupied the church so that the emperor can attend the service there, but they will only stay with him if the service is Catholic, otherwise they will cross over to attend Ambrose's Catholic service next door, as in fact some of them were to do.

3 The Vetus was very close. Cf. also G. Nauroy, 'Le fouet et le miel, le combat d'Ambroise en 386 contre l'arianisme', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 23 (1988), 48–51.

4 *Prodire*.

5 This sentence is about the composition of the force occupying the cathedral, which consisted mainly of Goths (cf. 76.20), and a few men from the court, perhaps there to fix the royal hangings, but no ordinary civilians.

6 The *Homoian* empress Justina.

7 At the end of c. 11 Ambrose has alluded to the fact that he has a congregation in the neighbourhood of the occupied Nova, but he has not actually said that after leaving his house and seeing the cathedral occupied, he entered the nearby Vetus. But that is what he evidently did, and when he had begun the service, he deduced from the groans of his congregation that this church too had been surrounded by soldiers.

8 Evidently the soldiers occupying the basilica were under orders to make it ready for the emperor, but not to prevent the public from entering the church.

– that we should march to that other basilica. In that basilica too, it was said, the people were demanding my presence.

14. Then I began the following sermon: My children, you have heard the Book of Job being read, which is regularly read at this service¹ on this day.² The devil himself was well aware from experience that that book would be publicised in which the whole armoury of his artifices³ is revealed and exposed. That is why he has bestirred himself against us all the more forcefully today. But thanks be to our God, who has made you so strong in faith and patience. I mounted the pulpit to marvel at Job, and found all of you Jobs to marvel over. Job lives again in every one of you; out of each one of you the patience and virtue of that holy man shine brightly. For what could be said by Christians that is more apposite than what has been spoken today by the Holy Spirit through you: ‘We are asking you to think again, Augustus, we are not being aggressive. We are not afraid, but we are asking you to think again.’ This is what befits Christians, to strive for the serenity of peace, and not to allow steadfastness for the faith and for truth to be overcome by fear of death. For God is our patron,⁴ *who will save⁵ those who hope in him.*⁶

15. But let us come to the readings before us. You see licence is given to the devil to test us, so that the virtuous may prove themselves.⁷ The evil one envies good men making progress in virtue, and tests them out in all sorts of ways. He tested out the holy Job through his ancestral possessions, he tested him out through his sons, he tested him out through bodily pain.⁸ A strong man is tested through his own physical suffering, a weaker man through another’s. From me too he wanted to take away my riches which I possess in you, and he desired to squander that inheritance represented by your serenity. And yourselves too, my good sons, he was eager to snatch from me, you for whom I daily renew the sacrifice. He was trying to entangle you in the fallout of the ruins of a public uprising. I have therefore already experienced two kinds of trial. And perhaps because the Lord God knows me to be rather weak he has not yet given (the devil)

1 *Sollemne munus*. See Mohrman 1965, 321, 328: *munus* = Greek *leitourgia*.

2 Note that Job is regularly read in Holy Week, as is Jonah (so too c. 25 below).

3 *Temptationum*.

4 *Praesul*.

5 *Salvum facere*, cf. Mohrmann 1965, 83, 138.

6 Based on Ps. 16.7 (Vulg. 17.7).

7 Job 1.12. Latin: *temptare*, but ‘tempt’ does not give the right meaning here.

8 Job 1.13–19; 2.7–9.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 167

power over my body. Even though I desire it, even though I offer myself, he perhaps still judges me unequal to that contest, and he exercises me with labours of a different kind. Nor did Job begin with that contest, but he finished with it.

16. But Job was tested by bad news heaped on bad news, he was also tested by the woman who said: *speaking some word against God and die*.¹ You observe how many trials are now suddenly launched against me.² Goths, weapons, federate troops,³ the merchants fined, and the saints punished. You realise what is being ordered to do when the instruction is given: 'surrender the basilica'? It is⁴ the equivalent of: *speaking some word against God and die*; and not just: 'speak against God' but: 'take action against God'. The instructions are: 'surrender the altar of God'.

17. So we are harassed by imperial edicts but we are fortified by words of the Bible, which enable us to give the reply: *you have spoken like one of the foolish women*.⁵ This testing is therefore no easy thing, for we know that trials and temptations⁶ issuing through women are particularly severe.⁷ After all Eve tripped up even Adam,⁸ and that is how he came to disobey the instructions of heaven. When Adam discovered his mistake, and his guilty conscience was accusing him, he longed to hide. But it was impossible for him to hide, and so God said to him: *Adam, where are you?*⁹ which is the same as: 'where have you been? Where are you now? Where had I placed you? Where have you strayed?'¹⁰ You know that you are naked, because you have lost the covering of the good faith. Those objects with which you are

1 Job 2.9.

2 'Against me' is not in the Latin, but it is implicit in the parallel between Ambrose and Job.

3 *Gentiles*.

4 *Hoc est*: Ambrose regularly uses this rather than the more popular *id est*, cf. Mohrmann 1965, 392.

5 Job 2.10.

6 *Temptatio*, which has been consistently translated 'trial', also has the meaning of the English 'temptation'. Both meanings are relevant here, because Ambrose is turning from Job to Adam, from a man who was tried to a man who was tempted. The verbal form is translated with 'test'.

7 The demand for the basilica at Milan too had originated from a woman, the empress Justina.

8 Both Job and Adam were tested, but Job passed, while Adam failed.

9 Gen. 3.9.

10 *Transgressus es*: Adam had gone into hiding, he had also 'transgressed' in the sense of 'sinned'; more specifically a *transgressor* was an apostate, cf. Mohrmann 1965, 134.

trying to cover yourself are leaves. Having rejected the fruit,¹ you are anxious to hide under the leaves of the law.² But you will be found out. For the sake of one woman you have chosen to abandon the Lord your God. That is why you now flee him whom you previously sought to see. With one woman for company you have chosen to hide yourself away, and to abandon the mirror of the world, your dwelling in paradise, the grace of Christ.³

18. Do I need to add that that Jezebel persecuted even Elijah most cruelly,⁴ that Herodias had John the Baptist killed.⁴ Particular women have been a trial for particular individuals. For myself, the trials are all the harder because my worth is so much less. My strength is weaker, my danger greater. One generation of women follows another. The objects of their hatred shift. Their intrigues change. Men in high positions are summoned to appear in court, and a charge of 'an insult to the emperor' is trumped up. What motive could there be for inflicting such a trial on a worm like me, unless it is not me but the Church which they are persecuting.

19. Finally, the order comes: 'Surrender the basilica!' I reply: 'Emperor, it is not lawful for me to surrender the basilica, nor is it right for you to receive it.⁵ No law entitles you to violate the house of a private individual, do you think that you may seize the house of God?' The argument put forward is that everything is permitted to the emperor, that the world is his. I reply: 'Do not make trouble for yourself, emperor, by thinking that you have any sort of imperial right over things that are God's. Do not exalt yourself. If you wish to rule for any length of time, be subject to God. It is written: *What is God's to God, what is Caesar's to Caesar.*⁶ Palaces belong to the emperor, churches to the bishop. The jurisdiction entrusted to you is over

1 That is, Adam has rejected the fruit of life in paradise through his disobedience to God. Rather confusingly Ambrose has moved from the real apple Eve offered to Adam to an allegorical fruit, representing life in paradise, the reward for obedience, which Adam has forfeited.

2 Adam's disobedience is seen as a rejection of faith. His action in covering himself with leaves is allegorised as hiding behind the Law. In most contexts this allegory would refer to the Jews who have rejected the true faith and adhere to the law of Moses. But here the Law is the law of the emperor, and Adam stands for the officials who claim to be acting in accordance with the law when they try to make the basilica (the Nova) available for an Arian service. Moreover as Adam sought to please a woman, Eve, so are the officials, who are carrying out the instructions of Justina, the emperor's mother.

3 1 Kg. 19.1

4 Mt. 14.3.

5 In the sermon Ambrose represents himself as having addressed to the emperor the essence, if not the precise wording, of the reply he in fact gave to the counts and tribunes in *Ep.* 76.8.

6 Mt. 22.21.

public buildings, not over sacred ones. The statement is repeated that the emperor had sent word: 'I too am entitled to have one basilica'. I reply: 'It is not lawful for you to have it. What business have you with an adulteress?'¹ For she who is not married to Christ in lawful marriage is an adulteress.'

20. While I was speaking about these events, it was brought to my attention that the imperial hangings had been folded away, and that the basilica² had been filled with people, and that my presence was being demanded. Immediately I brought my sermon round to this. I said: How lofty and profound are the prophecies of the Holy Spirit!³ You remember, brethren, the reading at Matins, which we then repeated⁴ with great sorrow of soul. It was: *O God, the heathens have come into your inheritance*.⁵ And heathens did indeed come, and very much worse than heathens: for it was Goths who came, and men of a variety of foreign tribes, and they came armed, and after placing a cordon around the basilica they occupied it.⁶ At this we were grief stricken, being unmindful of your profundity. But while our short-sightedness was contemplating one possibility, your grace was working towards another.

21. The heathens did come, but in truth they have come into your inheritance; for the men who came as heathens have been made into Christians. The men, who came to seize our inheritance, have become the co-heirs of God. I have defenders, people whom I used to think of as enemies; I possess allies, people whom I used to regard as opponents. The prophecy that David sang of the Lord Jesus has been fulfilled: *His abode has been established in peace and he has broken the horns of the bows, the shield, sword and war*.⁷ To whom do we owe this gift,⁸ to whom this achievement? To you Lord Jesus! You saw armed men come to your temple, the people groaning in consequence. Over here are the people groaning, and gathering together in great numbers, so as not to give the impression that they were surrendering the

1 That is, the Arian community. The forsaking the religion of God was first compared to harlotry by the prophet Hosea, e.g. 9.1: 'You have played the harlot, forsaking your Lord'.

2 The attempt to get the Nova ready for a service to be attended by the emperor had been given up, presumably because some of the troops had left to attend Ambrose's service, and thus shown that they could not be relied on.

3 Ambrose suggests that his choice of reading for Matins was a divinely inspired prophecy, though he did not realise it at the time.

4 Translating the perfect of the Maurist text *respondimus*. Zelzer reads *respondemus*, but the present tense does not fit the context which was a moment of triumph, not of grief.

5 Ps. 79.1 (Vulg. 78.1).

6 As described in c. 11.

7 Ps. 76.3 (Vulg. 75.3–4).

8 *Munus*, translated 'gift'.

basilica of God. Next there are soldiers commanded to use force. Death was before my eyes; but in order to stop mad fury being let loose between the two groups, you O Lord, thrust yourself between them, and you made the two parties one.¹ You restrained the armed men, no doubt saying the words: *What profit is there in my blood?*² if there is a rush to arms, if in my temple the trumpet of war is sounded? All thanks therefore be to you, Christ! It was not a legate, nor an envoy, but you, O Lord, who have saved your people. *You have torn away my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.*³

22. I was saying these things, in surprise that the emperor's anger could be assuaged by the zeal of the soldiers, the protestations of the counts, and the entreaty of the people. At that point I received the news that a notary⁴ was on his way to convey the emperor's instructions. I withdrew a little, he divulged the instructions. 'What were you thinking of,' he said, 'that you acted contrary to the emperor's wishes?' I replied: 'I do not know what his wishes are, and I am not sure what rash act is claimed to have taken place'. He said: 'Why did you send priests to the basilica? If you are a usurper⁵ I want to know, so that I know what preparations to make against you'. I replied, saying that I had done nothing to the disadvantage of the Church. On hearing that the basilica had been occupied by soldiers, I had merely given vent to greater distress; and when many people were calling on me to go there, I had said: 'Surrender the basilica I cannot, but participate in fighting I ought not'. But after I had learnt that the imperial hangings had been removed from the basilica, and when the people were demanding that I should go there, I sent some priests. I had refused to go myself, but said: 'I trust in Christ, that the emperor himself will come on to our side'. [I continued to the notary]

23. 'If that looks like the behaviour of a usurper, I agree that I have arms – but only for the service of Christ. I have power – to make the emperor an offering of my body. Why would he have hesitated to strike, if he thought me a usurper? Under the old dispensation, monarchy⁶ was conferred by

1 Cf. Eph. 2.14.

2 Ps. 30.9 (Vulg. 29.10).

3 Ps. 30.11 (Vulg. 29.12). This concludes the sermon.

4 See Glossary and Jones 1964, 572–75.

5 *Tyrannus*, almost a technical term for usurper or any rebellion against imperial power. Here Ambrose's act of having sent a priest to address the congregation in a church that has been sequestered on the orders of the emperor is being described as an act of rebellion.

6 The Latin is *imperium*, which designates the power of the emperor, but not of kings Saul, David and Solomon.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 171

priests,¹ and not usurped by force; and it is commonly said that emperors aspired to priesthood² rather than priests to monarchy. Christ fled to avoid being made king.³ We have our personal "usurper": weakness is the "usurper" of the priest.⁴ "*When I become weak*", Paul said, "*then am I strong*."⁵ But he against whom God has not raised up an adversary must take care not to conjure up a usurper against himself. Not even Maximus makes this claim, that I am a usurper against Valentinian. In fact he complains that he was unable to invade Italy⁶ on account of the intervention of my embassy.⁷ I added that priests have never been usurpers, but they have often suffered from usurpers.

24. We spent the whole day in this sorrowful state. The imperial hangings were, however, torn by children at play.⁷ I was unable to return home, because the soldiers who were guarding the basilica were stationed all round it. Together with the brethren we recited psalms in the smaller basilica.⁸

25. On the following day [Thursday 2 April], as is customary,⁹ the book of Jonah was read, and when it was finished I began the sermon with: 'A book has been read, brethren, in which it is prophesied that sinners are returning to repentance'. This was then interpreted to mean that we were to hope for the future in the present. I went on to say that this just man had been

1 Saul and David were anointed by Samuel, Solomon was anointed by Nathan.

2 Until 382 emperor had used the title *pontifex maximus*. See Cameron 1968, 96–99.

3 Jn 6.15.

4 The Latin translated as 'usurper' is still *tyrannus*, but the 'usurper' of the priest is obviously not a usurper in the usual sense (see next note). That is why I have used inverted commas. The idea is that the priest must fight his own weakness as the emperor must fight a usurper, and when he fights it, it becomes a source of strength.

5 2 Cor. 12.10. The usurpation of priesthood happens inside the priest himself. It is the 'thorn given me in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12.7), which is a source of strength because 'when I am weak then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12.10).

6 In 384. See *Ep.* 30 and McLynn 1994, 160–64.

7 This was in the Nova. Though the hangings had been taken down they had evidently not been removed. The emperor had not given up his claim to the Nova. That is why he could consider Ambrose's act of sending a priest into it an act of rebellion. The fact that the imperial hangings had been damaged made Ambrose's situation more dangerous. The stationing of soldiers around his church now prevented him from leaving the church to return to his residence that night.

8 The 'smaller basilica' is the basilica vetus, or perhaps if that was a separate building, the 'basilica of the baptisterium' (cf. c. 4).

9 *De more*: this sentence, like c. 14, implies that in Ambrose's church particular lessons were attached to particular days, from Job on the previous day, from Jonah on this.

willing to incur (God's) displeasure rather than see, or even prophesy, the destruction of a city. And it was because that prophecy was so harsh that Jonah had been saddened even by the withering of a gourd. We also read that God asked the prophet: 'Are¹ you sad for a gourd?' Jonah had replied: 'Sad'. Then the Lord our God had said that if for him the withering of a gourd was sufficient grounds for grief, how much more ought he (God) to be concerned for the salvation of so large a people. And that is why he had cancelled the destruction he had prepared for all the city.²

26. Soon after the news came that the emperor had ordered the troops to withdraw from the basilica,³ and that the money, which they had been fined, was to be returned to the merchants. Imagine the happiness of all the assembly at this moment, the cheers of all the people, the thanksgiving! Now it was the day on which our Lord gave himself up for us, when we are released from penance in the Church. Vying to bring the news, soldiers rushing towards the altars make it known with kisses, the symbol of peace. Then I realised that God had indeed smitten 'the worm that came at dawn, so that the whole city might be saved'.⁴

27. This is what happened, and would that this was the end of the story.⁵ But that worse disturbances are on the way is implied by some very threatening words of the emperor. I am called a usurper and even worse than a

1 Based on Jon. 4.9. But in RSV: 'Do you do well to be angry for plant?' Jonah is not sorry for the plant, but angry that he has been deprived of its shade. So too in the Vulgate. Ambrose's text has been emended to make Jonah's character more edifying.

2 Ambrose is pointing out that the biblical reading turned out to be prophetic. Milan was about to be spared, just as Nineveh was in the reading. Ambrose has made the same point about an earlier reading in cc. 21–22. A traditional Roman pagan would have said that the reading turned out to be an omen.

3 Previously the soldiers had only taken down the imperial hangings, now they were themselves withdrawn. The basilica evacuated by the troops was the Nova, but the withdrawal of the troops evidently also liberated the Vetus and the basilica of the baptistery, if that was a distinct basilica.

4 The worm is that of Jon. 4.7, though it is the gourd and not the worm that gets 'smitten'. By 'killing' the worm, Ambrose has reversed the biblical metaphor. As in Jonah the worm's fatal biting of the gourd is an image of the destruction of Nineveh, so the killing of the worm represents the saving of Nineveh, and hence the saving of the basilica for the Nicenes.

5 It clearly was not the end of the story. Ambrose had defeated the imperial attempt to sequester a church, but he still faced the possibility of being charged with treason. He seems to have avoided that too, but we do not know how. We have no evidence for what happened between the end of *Ep.* 76 and *Ep.* 77. McLynn 1994, 196–208, has filled the gap by placing the events of *Ep.* 75a and 75 in the interval. But this does not really fit. See pp. 126ff above.

AMBROSE'S CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA 173

usurper. For when the counts were beseeching the emperor to proceed to the church, and said that they were doing this at the request of the soldiers,¹ he replied: 'If Ambrose were to give you the order, you would hand me over to him in chains'. Just imagine what we can expect after that pronouncement. The pronouncement horrified everybody, but some of his men are working him up.

28. Finally Calligonus² too, the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*,³ with characteristic effrontery, dared to declare to me: 'Do you treat Valentinian with contempt while I am above ground? I shall have your head!' I replied: 'May God allow you to carry out what you are threatening. For I will suffer as befits a bishop, you will behave as befits a eunuch.' I only pray that God may deflect these people away from the Church, turn all their weapons on me, and quench their thirst with my blood.

1 This seems to be a reference back to c. 11.

2 *PLRE* 1.173.

3 For the office of head of the imperial household see the Glossary. Calligonus was executed in 388 (Ambrose, *De Ioseph* 33ff.; Augustine, *Contra Iulianum Pelagianum* 6.14.41). Calligonus has not been mentioned before. Could it be that the last chapter was added to the letter after the execution, so that readers who knew about Calligonus' bad end would recognise it as a punishment for his persecution of Ambrose? The remark assigned to Calligonus that he will not suffer Ambrose's effrontery 'while I am above ground', could well be a hint that he was no longer above ground when Ambrose wrote this.

ORATION ON THE DEATH OF THEODOSIUS I¹

INTRODUCTION

The emperor Theodosius died on 17 January 395. Forty days later (c. 3) Ambrose preached the address *On the death of Theodosius* at a service commemorating the dead ruler held in the cathedral at Milan, before the body was sent to Constantinople for burial. This was an official as well as a religious occasion. The congregation included the young western emperor Honorius (c. 3), civil and military dignitaries, and almost certainly Stilicho the regent.² The address has a clear political theme. Ambrose's words carry the unmistakable implication that the new regime is the legitimate successor and continuator of the old (c. 5). Ambrose reminds his audience, and especially the military part of it, that gratitude to Theodosius demands loyalty to his sons (cc. 7–8). The address to the army is significant, for its commander-in-chief Stilicho was regent for the eleven-year-old Honorius, and *de facto* ruler of the western empire. It is significant too that Ambrose explicitly supports Stilicho's disputed claim that the dying Theodosius has appointed him guardian not only of Honorius, ruler of the west, but also of the eighteen-year-old Arcadius in the east (c. 5). Ambrose emphasises that Theodosius had left written instructions that there should be an amnesty for the followers of the recently suppressed usurper Eugenius. Moreover he repeatedly praises Theodosius for his readiness to pardon his enemies (cc. 5, 12–14, 16–17). Pardon and reconciliation was indeed to mark the policy of Stilicho towards the followers of the defeated usurper.³

1 Latin text ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, pars 7, Vienna 1955, 369–401. M. D. Mannix, *Sancti Ambrosii Oratio de Obitu Theodosii, Text, Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, Catholic University of America Patristic Studies 16, Washington, DC 1930. English translation: Fathers of the Church 22, 307–22. See also M. Biermann, *Die Leichenrede des Ambrosius von Mailand: Rhetorik, Predigt, Politik* Hermes Einzelschrift 70, Stuttgart 1955.

2 Alan Cameron, 'Theodosius the Great and the Regency of Stilico', *Harvard Studies* 73 (1968), 247–80.

3 See below p. 179 n. 7.

The address is written in the tradition of the classical funeral oration, but in the tradition as it had been modified for use in a Christian service by Gregory of Nazianzus, and by Ambrose himself, above all in his address *On the death of Valentinian*.¹ Like that speech, it combines the function of an oration in praise of the deceased emperor with that of a sermon edifying a congregation. Like the speech commemorating Valentinian, it is constructed around the exegesis of a biblical text. Free allegorical exposition of Psalm 116 (Vulg. 114)² is used in *On the death of Theodosius* in the same way as exposition of Lamentations and Song of Songs is used in *On the death of Valentinian*. The effect is to present Theodosius not so much as an effective ruler, but as a model Christian, and thus as an example to rulers and subjects alike.

In c. 33 Ambrose announces his peroration, and proceeds to express his feelings of personal loss at the death of the monarch he loved (cc. 33–37), and to console the congregation with the thought that Theodosius is now in heaven reunited with deceased members of his family and Constantine.³ But the train of thought is interrupted, and Ambrose introduces a new theme: the story of how Helena, the mother of Constantine, found the holy cross together with the nails of the cross.⁴ This is the earliest version of this story that we have.⁵

The story of how Helena discovered the holy cross and with it the nails which she ordered to be incorporated into, respectively, the helmet and the bridle of her son Constantine, in effect presents Helena rather than Constantine as the founder of the Christian empire, or at any rate as the recipient of an emphatic signal from God sanctioning the Christian empire. Constantine himself has been briefly mentioned as being in heaven to welcome Theodosius (c. 40), but he is completely overshadowed by the elaborate account of the miraculous discovery made by his mother.

1 See below pp. 364–99.

2 Ambrose employs the extraordinary device of putting the words of the psalmist into the mouth of Theodosius, implying that the emperor was not only a disciple of the psalmist (King David), but an inspired prophet like him.

3 Cc. 31–39 continued after the digression in cc. 52–53.

4 Cc. 40–51.

5 E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land and Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1982, 28–49; J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, Leiden 1992. For further literature see Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*, Oxford 1999, 49–50, 280–81; on the use of the story by Ambrose: Y.-M. Duval, 'Formes profanes et formes bibliques dans les oraisons funèbres de saint Ambroise', in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en occident*, ed. M. Fuhrmann, Geneva 1968, 235–92, esp. 274–86.

In Eusebius and the ecclesiastical historians it is of course Constantine who established the Christian empire. But Constantine had executed Crispus, his son, and Fausta his wife, and he had been baptised by an Arian bishop. It may be that Ambrose thought that these actions had disqualified him from receiving an important message from God, or perhaps he was worried that Arian apologists might exploit sustained praise of Constantine. The stains on Constantine's reputation certainly did eventually have the effect that his legend became more important than his history.¹ The story of Helena and the nails of the cross, as it is here used by Ambrose, seems to be an early attempt to downgrade the historical Constantine, by making his mother the recipient of the divine sign that established the Christian empire.

The message of the Helena episode is that God wills future Roman emperors to be orthodox Christians.² This message is implicit in most of Ambrose's address, but the Helena episode makes it explicit.³ It is clearly an important message, and one with contemporary relevance, because the speech was composed only a few months after a last attempt to revive the old public religion of Rome.

The way the Helena episode is fitted into the oration *On the death of Theodosius*, particularly the fact that the whole section could be removed from that speech without disrupting its train of thought, suggests that it is an addition to the speech as delivered. It might be suggested that Ambrose added the episode when he decided to include the speech in Book Ten of his collection of letters.

Though it is not a letter, *On the death of Theodosius* has been transmitted in 63 out of 64 manuscripts of the letters,⁴ and always between *Epp.* 76 and 77. This has been taken by Zelzer as conclusive proof that it was already included in the *Collection* by Ambrose himself. The speech is not out of place in Book Ten, because it paints the portrait of an exemplary Christian ruler, and most of the letters in the book are concerned in one way or another with the duties of a Christian emperor. *On the death of Theodosius* therefore can be said to summarise the message of the tenth book. If Ambrose added the Helena episode to his original speech it might well have been in order to give a message of general relevance to a speech which was originally

1 S. N. C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds), *Constantine, History, Historiography and Legend*, London/New York 1998.

2 Duval 1968, 235–92, esp. 274–86.

3 See especially cc. 48–51.

4 O. Faller in *CSEL* 73.7, 117*.

focused precisely on only one emperor. Ambrose may well have thought that the Helena episode would give greater emphasis to his central message. It remains puzzling why he decided to place *On the death of Theodosius* between *Epp.* 76 and 77, that is, between the description of the conflict in Easter week 386 and the account of the finding of the bones of martyrs later in that year.¹ Perhaps he was hinting at a parallel between Helen's finding of the cross and his own discovery of the relics of two martyrs.

Like the speech on the death of Valentinian, this address is packed with biblical citations and allusions. Ambrose's use of biblical citations bears some resemblance to citations from Virgil and other classical authors by secular orators, if only up to a point. As a rule Ambrose's quotations from the Bible rarely correspond word for word to the texts familiar from the English Authorised Version or Revised Standard Version or even Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Our footnotes contain some references to the biblical text followed in particular citations.² Faller's text in CSEL 73 marks references which diverge from the Latin Vulgate text with an asterisk. He distinguishes references which are close to the Septuagint with (Sept.) He warns readers that closeness to the Septuagint does not necessarily mean that Ambrose is following the Greek directly. He could be following the *Vetus Latina* (Itala)³ which in his view was itself close to the Septuagint.⁴

TRANSLATION OF THE *DE OBITU THEODOSII*

1. This was what severe earthquakes and incessant rain were threatening, and a darkness gloomy beyond experience was foretelling,⁵ that our most merciful emperor Theodosius was about to withdraw from this earth. Thus the very elements were mourning his passing; the heavens were shrouded in darkness; the charged air trembled in unbroken gloom; the land, which was shaken by tremors, was deluged with inundating waters. And why should not the very universe bewail the fact that this prince was about to be snatched

1 Noted by K. and M. Zelzer in 'Retractiones zu Brief und Briefgenos bei Plinius, Ambrosius und Sidonius Apollinaris', in *Alvarium, Festschrift für Christian Gnifka*, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Suppl. 33, 2002, 393–405, relevant 396.

2 See also the notes of Mannix 1925.

3 See the many volumes of *Vetus Latina: die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel, nach Petrus Sabatier neu gesammelt von der Erzabtei Beuron*, Freiburg: Herder 1949–.

4 CSEL 73, 4*.

5 Cf. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle* (ed. Th. Mommsen) *MGH (AA)* 11.60–104, the year 394, p. 64, 6.

away, he through whom the hardships of this world were often alleviated, when he let reprieve forestall punishment?¹

2. He has indeed departed, he has not laid aside his kingdom but has exchanged it, and has been admitted by right of his piety into the tents of Christ, into that heavenly Jerusalem. There in his present abode he says: *As we have heard, so we can now see in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, which God has founded forever.*² But he has left behind very many, and above all his sons, destitute without the support of his fatherly protection. But they are not without support, for he has left them as heirs of his piety; they are not cut off, for he has won them the favour of Christ, and the loyalty of the soldiers to whom he was proof that God upholds piety and avenges treachery.

3. This was the emperor whose death all of us recently lamented. Now, forty days after, we are performing the solemn ceremony with the emperor Honorius standing by the altar. For just as Joseph, that holy man, carried out the obsequies for his father Jacob over forty days, so too did Honorius when he paid the respect due to his father Theodosius. And because some people are accustomed to observe the third and the thirtieth day and some the seventh and fortieth, let us look closely at what the text of scripture teaches. When Jacob died, it says, *Joseph instructed the undertakers in his service to bury him. And they buried Israel. And forty days were completed for him; for this is how the days of the funeral rites are reckoned. And Egypt mourned him for seventy days.*³ This, then, is the observance to be followed, which is set out in the text. But equally, in Deuteronomy it is written that *the children of Israel mourned Moses for thirty days and the days of mourning were completed.*⁴ So either observance has the authority through which the duty required of filial piety is fulfilled.

4. So Joseph was a good man who laid down the model of filial devotion; his father loved him and said to him, *'May my God help you, and may*

1 Although Theodosius' wrath was feared, as was shown most dramatically by the panic at Antioch after the Riot of the Statues in 387, the semi-official line of panegyrics was to stress his philanthropy and clemency: Themistius, *Or.* 15, 9; Themistius, in *Or.* 19.8f (between 383–87), praised Theodosius' clemency in terms very similar to those used by Ambrose in this passage. Emphasis on Theodosius' clemency recurs throughout our speech.

2 Echoes of Ps. 14.1; Rev. 21.10; and citation of Ps. 48.8 (Vulg. 47.9) in which Ambrose's Latin differs slightly from both the *Itala* and the Vulgate.

3 Gen. 50.2–3. Here Ambrose is quoting directly from the *Itala*. He is no doubt being careful to quote directly, citing the biblical texts as the law, because of the dispute over proper practice.

4 Deut. 34.8. Again, the direct quote is from the *Itala*.

*he bless you with the blessing of the all-containing earth, through the blessings of the breasts and the womb, the blessings of your mother; and through the blessing of your father.*¹ Joseph was the good offspring of a pious² father. He, then, celebrates the fortieth day of his father Jacob, that supplanter;³ and we are celebrating the fortieth day of Theodosius who, modelling himself on holy Jacob, supplanted faithless tyrants;⁴ and who did away with the false images of the gentiles – for his faith did away with the worship of idols and suppressed their ceremonies;⁵ he even grieved that the remission of punishment which he had granted to those who had offended against him had come to naught, and their pardon had been rescinded.⁶ But the sons will not refuse what the father has granted, they will not refuse it, even if someone has tried to subvert it, for those who rescind what he gave to individuals will not be able to refuse what he granted to everyone.⁷

5. No more glorious circumstance attended the passing from power of so great a leader, who had already handed everything to his sons – rule, power, the title of Augustus, nothing, I say, that he left behind when he died was more admirable than the fact – of huge importance to how many! – that, even though the promised mitigation of the exaction of the grain tax is delayed⁸ his remissions have been transmitted [to his heir] as an inheritance,⁹ with the result that the man who wanted to obstruct them has made himself

1 Gen. 49.25f. (Septuagint?).

2 'Pious' echoes the double sense of *pious*: dutifulness both to family and to gods.

3 See Gen. 25.25f. The verb *supplantavit* ('has supplanted') is used to describe Jacob's treatment of Esau in Gen. 27.36.

4 The faithless tyrants are the defeated usurpers Magnus Maximus and Eugenius.

5 See Gen. 31.19f. and 31.34; see also *CTh* 16.10.7–12.

6 According to Pacatus in *Pan. Lat.* 12.44 Theodosius had wanted to pardon even the usurper Maximus, but had been forestalled by his soldiers. Theodosius publicly praised Eugenius' pagan praetorian prefect Flavianus, who committed suicide after the battle of the Frigidus: *CIL* VI, 1783 lines 16ff.

7 It seems to be implied here that there was opposition to the general amnesty, and this can also be deduced from the emphatic emphasis on the Christian commandment of forgiveness through the whole of the oration. That some people should have called for exemplary punishment of the rebels is not surprising, though we do not know who they were. But clemency won the day. In *Epp. ex.* 2 and 3 Ambrose had commended clemency to Theodosius. After his death a policy of clemency was adopted: according to Oros. 7.35, only Eugenius himself and Arbogast died. Laws issued subsequently to this speech do in fact amount to an amnesty: see *CTh* 15.14.9–12. Ambrose claims that this policy had already been inaugurated by Theodosius.

8 See *CTh* 11.28.2 (of 24 March AD 395).

9 *Indulgentiae*: remission of taxes has been delayed but it, as well as the remission of punishment of the rebels, will be granted by Honorius.

hated, while Theodosius has not been deprived of a huge mass of gratitude. And not undeservedly, for if the final wishes of private citizens and the last wills of the dying are held as having permanent validity, how can it be that the last will of so great a prince should be invalid? Theodosius is more glorious in this also, that he did not make a will in accordance with public law;¹ he had nothing further to determine as regards his sons, to whom he had given everything, except to place them under the protection of a close relative² who was present.³ As regards his descendants and those committed to his care, he was obliged to make a will in order to distribute legacies and designate trusts. He requested the promulgation of an edict of indulgence, which he had left in writing.⁴ What is more fitting than that the last testament of an emperor should be a law?

6. An emperor of such greatness, then, has withdrawn from us. But he has not wholly withdrawn; for he has left us his children, in whom we can both see and embrace him. Their age should not trouble us!⁵ The loyal support of his soldiers⁶ makes the emperor's age fully grown. For age is fully grown when strength is. This is reciprocal. For the faith (*fides*) of the emperor produces strength in his soldiers.

7. You are calling to mind, no doubt, what victories the faith of Theodosius gained for you.⁷ When, because of the problems of the terrain and the hindrance of the camp followers, the army was falling into the battle line too

1 The fact that Theodosius had not put his last wishes regarding the government of the empire and the guardianship of his sons into writing left it to Stilicho in the west and Rufinus the praetorian prefect in the east to proclaim contrary versions of what Theodosius had wanted.

2 Stilicho, who was married to a niece of Theodosius. Note that according to Ambrose Stilicho had been appointed protector of both sons, not only of Honorius in the west but also of Arcadius in the east. This was what Stilicho claimed, and the basis of his bitter conflict with the East. See Alan Cameron, *Claudian*, Oxford 1970, 38–41.

3 *Praesenti* implies that Stilicho was present when Theodosius made his last arrangements, the word does not imply his presence at the funeral service, though Stilicho surely did attend the service, and prominently.

4 This was presumably the basis of the legislation published in the name of his sons between April and June 395: *CTh* 15.14.9–12.

5 At the death of Theodosius Arcadius (born c. 377) was 18 years old, Honorius (born 9 September 384) 11.

6 The pun making use of two meanings of *fides* is a compliment to Stilicho and his army, and at the same time also an expression of hope.

7 According to Zos. 4.57.2–3 in the campaign against Eugenius Timasius commanded the legions, Stilicho was his second in command, and the federates were under Gainas and Saul. Theodosius himself was in overall command.

slowly, and through the delay in joining battle the enemy's cavalry was seen to be charging, the emperor leapt down from his horse and, advancing alone before the line, cried out, 'Where is the God of Theodosius?'¹ He was saying this as one already close to Christ. For who possibly could say this except one who knew himself to be united with Christ?² By his cry he put heart into everyone, by his example he moved everyone to arms, a man undeniably advanced in years, but mighty because of his faith.³

8. Thus the faith of Theodosius was your victory; let your faithfulness⁴ be the strength of his sons. Thus does faith augment age. After all, Abraham,⁵ in seeking to beget a son in his old age, did not think about his time of life; and nor did Sara, in intending to give birth. And it is not to be wondered at that faith augments age, since it also makes the future present. For what is 'faith', other than assurance (*substantia*) of those things for which we hope?⁶ So the scriptures teach us. If, then faith is an assurance of things hoped for, how much more is it an assurance of things which are visible?⁷ Faith is good:

1 Ambrose is the only source to report these precise words.

2 See 1 Cor. 6.17.

3 There are many sources for the battle of the Frigidus, and their evidence is far from consistent. For a discussion of what happened, together with text and translation of all the sources see F. Paschoud, *Zosime, Histoire nouvelle*, Paris 1986, vol. 4, pp. 474–500. Ambrose's account is the earliest, but not it would seem the one closest to the truth. Ambrose gives no hint that the battle took place on two successive days, nor that on the first day it was Theodosius' Goths advancing out of a pass into the plain who launched the battle. John Chrysostom, *Homilia 6, adversus Catharos* (PG. 63.491–92) is the only other source to state that Theodosius jumped from his horse, but according to him Theodosius uttered 'a prayer to heaven', rather than the all but desperate exclamation reported by Ambrose. All Christian sources agree that Theodosius' decisive contribution was a prayer, but except for Ambrose, and perhaps John Chrysostom, they do not suggest that he prayed in the front line in the heat of battle.

4 Ambrose here uses the same word twice: *Theodosii fides* and *vestra fides* in this highly rhetorically wrought short sentence (exhibiting metaphor, isocolon, homoiopoton and alliteration); different words are needed in English to convey what was in Latin a different emphasis in a usage in which the one implies the other.

5 See Rom. 4.19–22; Hebr. 11.11; both referring to Gen. 17.17.

6 Hebr. 11.1. Ambrose's version differs here from other versions. The Vulgate text, to which RSV is close, gives *Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum argumentum non apparentium*.

7 The faith in 'things which can be seen', for which Ambrose calls, is confidence in the boy emperors, especially the 11-year-old Honorius. This was indeed vital if the dangers of child-rule were to be avoided.

concerning which it is written: *The just man lives by faith, but if he withdraw himself (from faith) he will not please my soul.*¹

9. Now, let us not withdraw ourselves at the expense of our souls, but stand fast in the faith for our souls' salvation.² Committed to this service of faith, our elders Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *received divine acknowledgement*,³ and consequently left us an inheritance of faith. Abraham was faithful, and he was justified not by his actions but by his faith, because he trusted in God;⁴ Isaac was faithful, and because of his faith did not fear the sword, even as his father was about to strike;⁵ and Jacob, following closely the track of his father's faith, in his wanderings saw an army of angels, and hailed it as the council of God.⁶

10. And elsewhere, too, that is in the book of Kings,⁷ Elisha was deep within Samaria and suddenly an army of Syrians surrounded and closed in on him. Gehazi saw them and said to his master: '*Lord, what shall we do?*' And Elisha the prophet said: '*Don't be afraid. For there are more with us than with them.*' And he prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of Gehazi. And his eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots around Elisha. And Elisha prayed that God would strike the Syrians with blindness. And they were struck blind and they went into the city into which they were making their way seeing nothing at all. You have surely heard, you soldiers who were surrounded (during the battle of the Frigidus),⁸ that wherever there is perfidy, there also is blindness. So the army of unbelievers deserved to be struck blind.⁹ But wherever there is faith, there is an army of

1 Hebr. 10.38. See also Rom. 1.17 and Gal. 3.1. Ambrose's quotation again differs from both the Vulgate and the *Itala*.

2 See Hebr. 10.39.

3 See Hebr. 11.2 (Vulg.: *testimonium consecuti sunt senes*).

4 See Gen. 15.6 and Rom. 4.1–22.

5 See Gen. 22.6ff.

6 See Gen. 32.1ff.

7 The following narrative from Kings is based on 2 Kg. 6.13–20. Ambrose also refers to this passage in his accounts of the confrontation with the Court of Valentinian II, in *Ep.* 75a.11 and *Ep.* 77.11.

8 This is a reference to an incident in the battle of the Frigidus, where Theodosius' army was caught between the forces of Eugenius in the plain and another hostile detachment in the mountains. Theodosius was saved because he managed to persuade the enemy forces behind him to change sides (Oros. 7.35.16; Sozomen, *HE* 7.24.5). Ambrose is therefore reminding the soldiers in his congregation that they have taken part in the battle and therefore must have heard of the miraculous blinding of the enemy army.

9 The troops of Eugenius were deprived of vision by a violent gale that suddenly blew clouds of dust in their faces. The troops are called upon to recognise a parallel between the biblical blinding of the Syrians and the blinding of the troops of Eugenius.

angels. Faith therefore is a good thing, which frequently is effective even among the dead. Indeed, our Adversary and his legions are daily tormented by the power of the martyrs.¹ On this account, I think, the strings of a zither are appropriately called *fides*, because, though dead, they produce sound.²

11. So we must try harder and harder to make sure that we are not ungrateful as we perform the obligations of life, let us bestow a steady and fatherly affection on the offspring of so pious a prince. Pay to his sons what you owe to their father. You owe him more now that he is dead than you did to him living. For if, even in the case of children of private citizens the rights of minors cannot be violated without grave sin, how much more is this true of children of an emperor?

12. And, above all, in the case of the children of so great an emperor as this – a pious emperor, a merciful emperor, a faithful emperor, the sort of emperor about whom scripture has spoken in terms that are not commonplace, saying: *great and held in honour is a merciful man, but to find a man worthy of trust is hard*.³ If it is a great thing to find any man whatsoever who is merciful, or who is worthy of trust, how much more so is it to find an emperor, whom power drives on to revenge but whom compassion yet calls back from vengeance? What is more striking than the faith of an emperor whom power does not exalt, pride does not puff up, but whom piety makes humble. Of him Solomon strikingly says: *The threat of a king is like the roaring of a lion, but like dew on the grass is his good humour*.⁴ How great a thing it is, then, to lay aside the fearsome power and to give preference to amiable benevolence (*gratia*).

13. Theodosius of revered memory⁵ thought that he had been done a good turn whenever he was asked to pardon, and he was especially keen to forgive especially when the passion of his anger had been particularly great. For him to have been furious was a guarantee of pardon, and in his case one longed for what one dreaded in others, that he should be in a rage. This was

1 Faith is effective among the dead in the first place because it enables the dead to rise, but also because the devils are tormented by the martyrs.

2 See *Ep.* 77 for the powers of martyrs; also *Exh. virg.* 2.9. The paradox with which Ambrose ends this passage has echoes of 1 Cor. 14.7.

3 Pr. 20.6. Ambrose is closest to Septuagint here. The Latin *vir fidelis* means a man of faith as well as of trust.

4 Pr. 19.12 (*Italia*).

5 *Augustae memoriae Theodosius*: this phrase employs a genitive of quality, a characteristically Christian usage, often used in reference to the patriarchs, to martyrs and to highly regarded bishops after their deaths.

a boon to the accused, because while holding supreme power over everyone, he would rather remonstrate like a parent than punish like a judge. We have often seen men quaking as he as was rebuking them. Yet when they had been convicted and had given up all hope, they were acquitted of the charge. For he wished to overcome them, not to crush them, a just judge and not a hanging judge, who never denied pardon to one admitting guilt; or if there was anything which a furtive conscience seemed to conceal, he left that to God. Men used to fear that voice of his more than punishment, because the emperor behaved with such magnanimity (*verecundia*) that he preferred to attach men to himself by bonds of devotion rather than of fear.

14. They say that the greatest of the philosophers¹ granted immunity from punishment to those crimes which had been committed through anger, but divine scripture says something better: *Be angry and do not sin*.² It preferred to cut sin out rather than to excuse it. It is better in a moment of anger to win praise for mercy rather than to be roused by rage to retribution.

15. So who therefore will doubt that when he is in the presence of the Lord, Theodosius will be a most effective advocate for his sons? With the Lord's help, the emperor Arcadius is already a robust young man, Honorius is already knocking on the door of adulthood, a little older than Josiah.³ The latter, having lost his father and taken supreme power, lived on to the thirty-first year of his reign; and he pleased the Lord because, more than the other kings of Israel, he celebrated the pasch⁴ of the Lord, and abolished false religious practices. Similarly Asa was not as yet fully mature physically⁵ when he took up the reins of government, yet he ruled for forty years in Jerusalem.⁶ He it was who, when pressed by an unending and unnumbered

1 Presumably Plato, see *Laws* 9.7–9; he does not, however, allow full impunity. By using *ferunt* (they say) Ambrose implies that he has not read the pagan philosopher himself.

2 Ps. 4.4 (Vulg. 4.5).

3 2 Kg. 22–3. Josiah was 8 years old at his accession. Like Honorius he acceded as a boy, but also, like Theodosius, he later fought idolatry and promoted the religion of the Lord. The implication is that Honorius might grow up to be a second Theodosius.

4 Josiah's Passover: 2 Kg. 23.21–23; 2 Chron. 35.1–19. This was the Jewish Passover, but the Pasch of the Lord is of course also the Christian Easter.

5 2 Kg. 23.4–20. Josiah purged religious practices of pagan elements, which the biblical context suggests had corrupted the pure Jewish religion taught by God to Moses, but which modern scholars think were traditional cults now found incompatible with the pure monotheism preached by the prophets and institutionalised by Josiah.

6 See 1 Kg. 15.9–24; also 2 Chron. 14.2–16.14: Asa's length of reign is actually given here as forty-one years.

multitude of Ethiopians, trusted that with the Lord [on his side], and with only small numbers he could be saved. If only he had been as faithful throughout as he was at the outset! For, after having been saved with only small numbers and winning the victory, he later appealed for help to the Syrians, abandoning the Lord, and summoning doctors for a disease of the feet. Seeing that he had received so great an indication of divine favour, he ought not to have cast aside his helper, but clung to Him. Consequently, even doctors did him no good, and he paid the penalty of death like an unbeliever.

16. But the fathers of these men,¹ Abijah and Amon, were both faithless.² Theodosius, on the other hand, was full of the fear of God, full of mercy; we therefore hope that he is assisting his children in the presence of Christ, if the Lord is favourably inclined to human concerns. A merciful man is a blessing. As he helps others, he also benefits himself, and in healing others tends his own wounds. For the man who knows forgiveness acknowledges his own humanity, and follows the paths of Christ, who, on assuming flesh, chose to come into this world as a redeemer rather than as a judge.

17. Hence the psalmist has nobly said: *I have loved, seeing that the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer*. In this psalm, as it was read,³ we seemed to hear Theodosius himself speaking. 'I have loved', he says; I (Ambrose) recognise that pious voice, I also recognise the testimony of that voice. And he (Theodosius) did truly love, he who fulfilled the duties of one who loves,⁴ who spared his opponents, who loved his enemies, who pardoned those who entreated him, who did not allow those who contested his rule to perish. The voice saying *I have loved* belongs to one who is not partly, but fully perfect in the Law; for *love is the fulfilling of the Law*.⁵ But now let us hear what he

1 The fathers respectively of Josiah and Asa.

2 The Latin *infideles* can mean 'faithless' or 'unbelievers', usually the latter in ecclesiastical writers of this period, though both senses are present here. Both of the kings named turned to idolatry, which is an implicit contrast with Theodosius, who attacked it.

3 Ps. 116.1 (Vulg. 114.1). Duval 1976, 234–301, esp. 277ff. argues convincingly that Ps. 116, on which the central sections of Ambrose's address is based, had been read at the service. Ambrose goes on to say that these words of the psalm might have been spoken by Theodosius himself, because they so perfectly express his piety. Subsequently he assumes the identity of the points of view of Theodosius and of the psalmist to the point of assigning the words of the psalm to Theodosius himself, or rather he uses the words of the psalm to illustrate what Theodosius might have said, but he omits anything like an 'as it were' which would signal that he is using an illustration.

4 The Latin word for 'to love' here is *diligere*, which together with *requies*, rest, or 'the peace that passes all understanding' become central concepts in subsequent parts of the sermon.

5 Rom. 13.10.

has loved. When we are not told what kind of love is meant, the reference is surely to the grace of divine charity, with which we love that which is desirable above all desirable things,¹ of which it is written *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*.²

18. And so the devout soul,³ as it was departing from earth, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and as if he was answering questions of those (angels) who came to meet him⁴ as he was rising to the lofty regions above, kept saying: 'I have loved'. Nothing more explicit than this, nothing more detailed. The angels and archangels were asking him: 'What did you do on earth?' – for God is the sole observer of hidden things⁵ – and the soul kept saying, 'I have loved.' This is to say *I have fulfilled the Law*,⁶ I have not ignored the Gospel; this is to say *I have offered myself to death, and all day long I am accounted as a sheep for the slaughter*.⁷ For *I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor powers, nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.⁸

19. Our Lord Jesus in the gospel also teaches that this commandment of the law is to be obeyed⁹ when he says to Peter: '*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*' and he replied, '*You know, Lord, that I love you.*' And He said a second time, '*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*' And again he answered, '*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*' And asked a third time he said, '*Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.*'¹⁰ And so his threefold answer confirmed his love, indeed wiped out the fault of his threefold denial. And here,¹¹ if we search, we find a threefold answer: '*I have loved because the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer; I have loved*' because '*He inclined his ear to me*' so that '*in all my days*' I should pray to him; '*I have loved,*' since

1 Compare Pr. 8.11.

2 See Deut. 6.5; Mt. 22.37.

3 Compare this section with Origen, *In Rom.* fr. 8.38.

4 Angels and archangels.

5 See Dan. 13.42 (Vulg.): unlike God, angels do not know everything that men do think. Dan. 13, the story of Susanna and the elders, has been transmitted in the Greek and not the Hebrew tradition as one of the Apocryphal books. See *New English Bible: Apocrypha*, Oxford 1970, 267–70.

6 Rom. 13.8

7 See Ps. 116.1 (Vulg. 114.1), compare Ps. 44.22 (Vulg. 43.22).

8 Rom. 8.38–39.

9 Deut. 6.5; Mt. 22.37: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God'.

10 Jn 21.15–17.

11 Once more in Ps. 116 (Vulg. 114).

'I have met with pain and anguish' and in the name of my God I have not fled *'the dangers of Hell'*, but have waited that they could seize and find me.¹

20. And nobly² does he say 'I have loved', because now he had completed the course of his life. And so the Apostle also says when already in the midst of his suffering: *'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; for the rest, there is reserved for me a crown of justice.'*³ Great is the Lord, who has given us contests in which he who has conquered will earn a crown. *'I have loved'*, he says, full of trust, *'because the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer.'*⁴

21. *I have loved* and therefore, *He has inclined his ear to me*⁵ to raise up the fallen and to quicken the dead. For God does not incline His ear to hear in a bodily sense, but so as to bring himself down to our level, so that He can deign to hear us and raise up the weakness of our human condition. He inclines Himself toward us so that our prayer may ascend to Him. He who grants mercy does not need a voice; nor did He need a voice, when he heard a speechless Moses.⁶ As Moses was interceding without speaking, God kept saying that he was crying out *with sighs too deep for words.*⁷ God is also able to hear blood, which has no voice to assist it, and is without a tongue; but it received a voice in the glory of the sacred Passion.⁸ It cried out in martyrdom, it cried out in that act of fratricide, which it endured as a sacrifice.⁹

1 The passage is largely composed out of bits of Ps. 116.1–3 (Vulg. 114.1–3).

2 The epithet applied to the psalmist in c.17 is now applied to Theodosius..

3 2 Tim. 4.7ff.

4 Ps. 116.1 (Vulg. 114.1). After using the psalm to comment on Peter's reply to Christ, Ambrose once more cites 'I have loved' as spoken by Theodosius to sum up his life, and then extends the characterisation by quoting Paul's final summing up of his own career. The effect is to suggest that the struggles experienced by Theodosius in the course of his reign were comparable to the struggles and sufferings of apostles and martyrs.

5 Ps. 116.2 (Vulg. 114.2).

6 See Ex. 14.13–15 which does not report any verbal intercession by Moses to account for the Lord's 'Moses why do you cry to me'. This has been interpreted by Origen (*In ex. hom.* 5.4, trans. R. E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Washington, DC 1982) to mean that Moses' intercession had been non-verbal. Ambrose adopted this interpretation here as in his *Explanation* of Ps. (Vulg.) 38.7 (CSEL 64.189), and *Commentary* on Ps. (Vulg.) 118.19.9–10 (CSEL. 62.426–27).

7 The phrase is from Rom. 8.26. But there it is the Holy Spirit not Moses who intercedes 'with sighs too deep for words'.

8 The reference here is to Christ's suffering; Ambrose also refers to the voice of blood in similar terms in *Ep.* 77.23.

9 The parricide is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Gen. 4.10).

22. *'I have loved'*, he said, *'and in loving I have therefore done the will of the Lord and I have called upon Him, not a few times, but in all the days of my life.'*¹ For to call on Him on certain days, and not on all, is the behaviour of an arrogant person, not of one living in hope, and it is to offer a payment of gratitude in return for enjoying abundant advantages, not out of devoted love. And so Paul said: *'In all circumstances give thanks.'*² For are you ever without something which you owe to God? Or is there ever a time when you are without a gift of God, seeing that each day the enjoyment of life comes to you from God? For *what do you have that you did not receive?*³ It follows that because you are always receiving from God, you must always call upon Him; and, because all that you have is from the Lord God, always acknowledge that you are His debtor. But I would rather have you pay your debt as one who loves than under compulsion.

23. You hear Theodosius saying: *'The pangs of death have encompassed me,'*⁴ still, even in the pain of death, *I have loved the Lord. The perils of hell have found me'*⁵ not at all afraid, but loving, but hoping that no persecution, no dangers, no sword shall separate me from Christ.' In fact, he willingly encountered *suffering and sorrow*, knowing that *suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces proof, and proof, hope.*⁶ And indeed, like a good athlete he entered contests to gain the crown, but yet he knew that it was given to him not by his own strength but through the help of the Lord. For he could not have been victorious had he not called upon Him who supports those who are contending.

24. Wretched man enters the contest in order to be victorious, and he gratuitously rushes headlong into danger, unless the name of the Lord be present with him, unless when he is filled with dread he prays, saying *Lord, save my soul.*⁷ Hence the following saying of the Apostle: *I see a law of my flesh fighting against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my bodily members. Wretched man that I am, who will*

1 See Ps. 116.1, 2, 4 (Vulg. 114.1, 2, 4); Ps. 27.4 (Vulg. 26.4). Ambrose here again introduces the direct voice of Theodosius.

2 1 Thess. 5.18.

3 1 Cor. 4.7.

4 Ps. 116.3 (Vulg. 114.3).

5 Ps. 116.1, 3. The words put into Theodosius' mouth here are a paraphrase of this together with Rom. 8.35.

6 Rom. 5.3.

7 Ps. 116.4 (Vulg. 114.4).

*save me from that body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*¹

25. The man that wins is he who hopes for the grace of God, not he who presumes upon his own strength.² For why not presume upon grace when you have a judge over the contest who is merciful? For *merciful and just is the Lord and our God shows mercy*.³ He referred to mercy twice, justice once; justice is in the middle, enclosed by twin walls of mercy; sins greatly abound, let mercy therefore greatly abound. With the Lord there is an abundance of all the virtues,⁴ since He is *the Lord of virtues*.⁵ Nevertheless, there is neither justice without mercy nor is there justice without compassion; for it is written *be not over-just*.⁶ Whatever exceeds (the right) measure, even if it is a good in itself, you will not be able to bear the consequences. Observe measure, in order that you may receive according to measure.⁷

26. For justice does not stand in the way of mercy, because mercy itself is justice. *He has distributed, he has given to the poor, his justice endures for ever*.⁸ For the just man knows that he ought to come to the help of the weak and the needy. Hence the Lord coming to baptism, in order to forgive us in our weakness our sins, said to John: *'let it be so now; for it is proper for us to do this for full justice to be achieved'*.⁹ Clearly, then, justice is mercy and mercy is justice. In fact, if the mercy of God did not sustain us, how could we ever survive our very beginning as infants, when cast out of the womb from warmth into the cold, from moist to dry, we flounder like fish, shipwrecks cast into this life by some tidal wave of nature?¹⁰ Reason is absent, but divine grace does not fail. So then, He himself *protects the little children*,¹¹ or at least those who by their humble demeanour confess themselves to be little children.

1 Rom. 7.23–25.

2 See Jg. 6.15.

3 Ps. 116.5 (Vulg. 114.5).

4 See Rom. 5.20.

5 Ps. 24.10 (Vulg. 23.10). Where the Latin has *dominus virtutum* ('the lord of virtues') both King James and the RSV have 'the lord of hosts'.

6 Ec. 7.17 (Vulg.).

7 See Mt. 7.2; Eph. 4.7; Origen, *De princ.* 2.11.6, 107; Ambrose, *Ep.* 7.6.

8 Ps. 112. 9 (Vulg. 111.9).

9 Mt. 3.15.

10 See Philo, *De mundo opificio* (*Concerning the Creation of the World*) 161; could Ambrose also have had Lucretius, 5.222–25, in mind?

11 Ps. 116.6. (Vulg. 114.6).

27. Humility is therefore a good thing, which extricates people from danger, and raises those who are prostrate. King David was familiar with this, when he said: '*See it is I; I have sinned, I the shepherd have done wrong, and these in this flock, what have they done? Let your hand be against me.*'¹ He too (Theodosius) expressed this well, when he placed his kingdom under God and did penance; and having confessed his sin, asked for pardon. So he attained salvation through humility.² Christ humbled himself in order to raise up all.³ So he attained Christ's rest, when he imitated Christ's humility.

28. And so, because Theodosius, the Emperor, showed himself to be humble and asked for forgiveness when sin stole upon him, his soul has returned to its rest,⁴ as scripture expresses it, which says, *return, O my soul, to your rest, for the lord has been good to me.*⁵ How nobly it says to the soul, *return*, as to one utterly wearied by the daily round, so that it might turn from work to rest. The horse returns to the stable when it has completed its race; and the ship to port, when it is drawn from the immensity of the waves to its trusty mooring. But what can scripture mean by *to your rest* if not that you are to understand it in the light of this our Lord saying: *Come, you who are blessed by my father, take possession of your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*⁶ For what was promised to us we receive as an inheritance, for *God is faithful*,⁷ and what he has once prepared for his servants he does not take away. If only our faith remains constant, his promise will remain constant too.

29. Observe, O man, the grace of Christ all around you! You are still hounded on earth, yet you have possessions in heaven! So let your heart be, where your possessions are.⁸ This is the rest which is owed to the just but denied to the unworthy. That is why the Lord says: *As I swore in my anger,*

1 2 Kg. 24.17.

2 This refers to the act of penance performed by Theodosius in 390, after the massacre at Thessalonica. See *Ep. ex.* 11; Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 24; Rufinus, *HE* 2.18; Sozomen, *HE* 7.25; Theodoret, *HE* 5, 7.

3 See Phil. 2.8.

4 *Requies*: 'rest' is a rather colourless translation for what is in effect 'the peace of God that passes all understanding' (Phil. 4.7). The whole subsequent passage is a development of the theme of *requies*, 'rest'.

5 Ps. 116.7 (Vulg. 114.7).

6 Mt. 25.34.

7 1 Cor. 1.9.

8 See Mt. 6.21. Ambrose has changed the mood and the order of the phrases.

*they shall not*¹ *enter into my rest.*² For they who *have not known the ways* of the Lord, do not go into the rest of the Lord. To him, however, who *has fought the good fight and finished the race*,³ it is said: *Return to your rest.*⁴ It is a blessed rest, to pass by the things of this world and to find repose in the fellowship of the heavenly mysteries, which are above the world. This is the rest toward which the Prophet hastened, saying: *Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?*⁵ This rest the holy man⁶ knows to be his, to this rest he tells his soul to return. It follows that his soul was already familiar with that rest, to which he says it must return. This is the rest of the Great Sabbath,⁷ in which each one of the saints exists above the sensible things of the world, wholly intent on that intelligible mystery, and clinging fast to God.⁸ This is the rest of that great sabbath on which God rested from all the work of this world.⁹

30. Now that he has been released from toil, Theodosius is glad to have been *snatched away*¹⁰ from these worldly responsibilities, and, lifting up his soul, sets its course towards that eternal rest, and declares that he had been splendidly looked after, seeing that God *has snatched his soul from death*; that death which he often withstood in the treacherous conditions of this world, buffeted by the waves of sin. And God has also snatched *his eyes from tears*.¹¹ For *sorrow and sadness and sighing have fled away*.¹² And elsewhere we have: *He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying nor sorrow*.¹³ If, then, death shall be no more, he being settled in that rest will not be capable of experiencing

1 So Ps. 95.11 (Vulg. 94.11); the oath is that recorded in Num. 14.26ff.

2 Ps. 95.11; also Hebr. 4.3.

3 See 2 Tim. 4.7.

4 Ps. 116.7 (Vulg. 114.7).

5 Ps. 55.7 (Vulg. 54.6).

6 The author of Ps. 116 (Vulg. 114), and by implication also Theodosius.

7 The eternal rest in heaven.

8 In this sentence Ambrose employs the vocabulary of later Platonism, which contrasted the 'sensible' world, i.e. that known through the bodily senses, with the 'intelligible' world, known through the mind or soul. See R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, London 1972, especially 84–85 on the return of the soul to the intelligible world; cf. also Augustine, *Conf.* 9.10.

9 See Gen. 2.2.

10 Echoes Ps. 116.8 (Vulg. 114.8).

11 Ps. 116.8 (Vulg. 114.8).

12 Is. 53.10.

13 Rev. 21.4.

a fall,¹ but will please *God in the land of the living*.² For, while here man is enveloped in a *body of death*,³ and is liable to fall and transgress, that emphatically is not so there. For that is the land of the living and it is the soul that is there, which has been made *in the image and likeness*⁴ of God, and not flesh formed *from dust*.⁵ So the flesh returns to earth, the soul hastens to celestial rest, and to it is said *Return, my soul, to your rest*.⁶

31. Theodosius hastened to enter into this rest, and to enter the city of Jerusalem, of which it has been said: *and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it*.⁷ It is the true glory, which is displayed there; it is the most blessed of kingdoms, which is possessed there, the kingdom to which the apostle was hastening, when he said *We are therefore of good courage and would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord; and so whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him*.⁸

32. Freed, therefore, from the uncertainty of the contest, Theodosius of revered memory now enjoys eternal light and lasting peace, and in return for the deeds he performed in this body he rejoices in the fruits of divine recompense. It was therefore because Theodosius of revered memory loved the Lord his God he has earned the fellowship of the saints.

33. And I too – to close my address with some sort of peroration⁹ – *have loved*¹⁰ a merciful man, humble in power, endowed with a pure heart and a

1 The Latin *lapsus*, 'fall', here refers to sin.

2 Ps. 116.9 (Vulg. 114.9).

3 See Rom. 7.24.

4 See Gen. 1.26ff. In stressing here that it is the soul and not the body that is made in God's image, Ambrose is presenting a Platonic interpretation, similar to that found in Origen, *De principiis* 3.6.1. This work is translated into English by G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles*, Gloucester, MA 1973.

5 See Gen. 2.7

6 Ps. 116.7 (Vulg. 114.7).

7 Rev. 21.24.

8 2 Cor. 5.8.

9 A very long peroration. There is an unresolved scholarly debate whether the 'Helena excursus' (cc. 40–53) was part of the speech as originally delivered, or whether it was subsequently added for the benefit of readers, contemporary and in years to come.

10 This starts a new section: Ambrose now praises Theodosius specifically for his relations with the Church, and especially the Church's representative at Milan. He now speaks in his own person the word of the psalmist which he had previously put in the mouth of Theodosius: 'I have loved'. This is in accordance with Menander Rhetor's advice on the composition of a consolatory speech: 'it will not preserve the sequence of the encomia, because the speaker gives the impression of being out of his mind and distracted by emotion' (Menander Rhetor, edited

gentle disposition, a man such as the Lord is wont to love, saying *in whom shall I find consolation if not in the humble and meek.*¹

34. *I have loved* a man who valued a critic more than a flatterer. He threw to the ground all the royal attire he was wearing; he wept publicly in church over his sin which had stolen upon him through the deceit of others;² with groans and tears he prayed for forgiveness.³ What private citizens blush to do the emperor did not blush to do, to perform public penance; and afterwards not a day passed on which he did not grieve for that fault of his. What about the fact that, after he had gained a famous victory,⁴ he nonetheless, because of his enemies fallen in battle, abstained from participation in the sacraments, until he sensed the grace of the Lord God towards him in the arrival of his children?⁵

35. *I have loved* a man who in his last moments and with his last breath kept asking for me. *I have loved* a man who, in the very moment he was being set free from the body, was more anxious about the state of the churches than about his own dangers.⁶ Yes, *I have loved*, I admit it, and for that reason my grief has pained me to the core of my being, and I have thought it right to relieve my grief by attending his funeral with the extended tribute of my address. *I have loved* and I am confident that the Lord will accept the *voice of my prayer*, with which I am attending his pious soul.

with translation and commentary by D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, Oxford 1981, 181). Ambrose also seems to be implying that his attitude to Theodosius parallels that of Theodosius to God.

1 See Is. 66.2. Ambrose reads: *supra quem requiescam*, the Vulgate: *ad quem autem respiciam*, the Itala: *super quem respiciam*.

2 According to *Ep. ex.* 11.6 (Maur. 51) Theodosius wanted to cancel the order for the massacre but was forestalled.

3 On the ritual for penance in Milan at this time see R. Gryson, *Le prêtre selon saint Ambroise*, Louvain 1968, 275–90. Ambrose, *De paenitentia*, PL 16.847–50 (CSEL 73.117–206; trans. H. de Romestin, ‘On Penitance’, in *Some Principal Works of St Ambrose*, NPNF 10, 329–59). Ambrose implies here that Theodosius prostrated himself on the ground in his royal state and so begged the congregation for forgiveness and the bishop for readmission.

4 After the defeat of Eugenius at the river Frigidus on 8 September 394, Theodosius sent to Constantinople for Honorius, who was accompanied by Serena, the niece of Theodosius, and wife of his general Stilicho. They arrived shortly before the emperor’s death.

5 Since there is no reason to suppose that Arcadius left Constantinople, the reference to ‘children’ indicates that his daughter Galla Placidia was in the party.

6 Throughout his reign, and to the last, Theodosius devoted a great deal of energy to trying to resolve the various conflicts that were dividing the Church.

36. *The sorrows of death encompassed me, the perils of hell have found me*;¹ for those in peril are many, but the remedies only for few. The bishop shares the peril with everyone, he suffers anguish with every guilty person; for whatever others suffer, he also endures; on the other hand, he too is released when others who have been in danger are set free. I am sick at heart because a man has been snatched away from us whom it is hardly possible to replace. Nevertheless it is You, O Lord, and You alone who must be called on,² who must be implored to bring him back in his sons. O Lord, *protector* even of the *least*³ in this lowly place, save *those whose hope is in You*.⁴ Give perfect rest to your servant Theodosius, the same rest which you have prepared for your saints. Let his soul return to the place from which it descended, where it will not be unable to feel the sting of death,⁵ where it will experience that this death is the end not of existence, but of wrongdoing. *The death he died, he died to sin*,⁶ so that now there cannot be any place for sin. But he will rise again, so that by a gift of renewed grace a more perfect life shall be restored to him.

37. *I have loved*, and so I attend him right up to the *land of the living*,⁷ and I shall not desert him until I conduct the man with tears and prayers to the place where his merits call him, to the *holy mountain of the Lord*,⁸ where there is life eternal, where there is no touch of decay, no sighing, no sorrow,⁹ no community of the dead. (This is) the true *land of the living*, where this *mortal nature* shall put on *immortality* and this *perishable nature* imperishability.¹⁰ (This is) the great *peace* which fulfils the prayer of the loving soul, (our) most glorious promise.

1 Ps. 116.3 (Vulg. 114.3).

2 Ps. 116.4 (Vulg. 114.4).

3 Ps. 116.6 (Vulg. 114.6).

4 Ps. 17.7 (Vulg. 16.7).

5 See Ps. 116.8 (Vulg. 114.8); also the hymn *Te deum laudamus*, v. 17, on whose authorship see A. E. Burn, *The Hymn 'Te deum' and its Author*, Cambridge 1926; and E. Kahler, *Studien zum 'Te deum'*, Göttingen 1958.

6 Rom. 6.10.

7 Ps. 116.1, 9 (Vulg. 114.1, 9), the act of 'escorting' is the speaking of this sermon.

8 See Ps. 2.6; 3.4; 15.1.

9 See Is. 35.10.

10 See 1 Cor. 15.53.

That is why the psalm is numbered the one hundred and fourteenth.¹ Earlier (in the Book) we have indeed learnt from psalm fourteen² what makes a perfect man. But there the man is still being educated, though he is being perfected yet he is still subject to sin, because he is living in this world. True perfection is in that place, where guilt has indeed ceased and which is radiant with the grace of perpetual peace.³

38. The reason therefore why the psalm is the hundredth plus the fourteenth⁴ is because it is (about) the reward for love (charity).⁵ The Pasch of our Lord has been assigned a schedule of celebration on the fourteenth day⁶ for the same reason, because he who celebrates the Pasch ought to be perfect, he ought to love the Lord Jesus, who, loving His people, subjected Himself to his passion with perfect devotion (charity).⁷ As to ourselves, let our love too be so great that for the sake of the Lord's name, if the need arises, we do not flee from death, we count pain as naught, and fear nothing; for *perfect love (charity) casts out fear*.⁸ The number indicates a great mystery, because when the Father gave up his only Son for all of us, the moon at full orb was radiant with its light. For so too the Church is radiant as it piously celebrates the Pasch of our Lord Jesus Christ: *like the moon* it remains *perfect forever*.⁹ Whoever here on earth celebrates fittingly the

1 Modern editors take this to be an example of Ambrose's usage of the mystic significance of numbers, in particular 4 and 10. In such number symbolism, the Greek letters indicating the number 14 could be taken to signify 'Jesus-Gift'. A more explicit discussion of this in Ambrose's work is found at *De Abraham*, 2, 9, 65, which is based on Philo, *De Abraham*, 13. The interpretation represents the numbers 10 and 4 as containing all creation and leading to perfection or the perfected life.

2 Ps. 14 (Vulg.) (= 15 RSV).

3 The word is once more *quies*, which I have elsewhere generally translated colourlessly as 'rest'.

4 14 indicates *caritas*, 114 the reward for it.

5 In this section Ambrose employs three words which can all be translated by 'love', but in this passage he uses 'charity', *caritas*, in the sense in which it is used in 1 Cor. 13.4–8.

6 See Gen. 12.6; Lev. 23.5. The Sunday after the Jewish Passover (14 Nissan) was the day of Christ's resurrection, and this became the date of the Christian feast of Easter, identified as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. As often, Ambrose is here following Roman practice. The date of Easter was a controversial issue, which Ambrose discusses at length in *Ep. ex.* 13. See below pp. 281–91.

7 Cf. 1 Cor. 16, 22.

8 1 Jn 4.18.

9 Ps. 89.37 (Vulg. 88.38).

Pasch of the Lord shall be in light perpetual. (But) who celebrated it more gloriously than the man who got rid of sacrilegious errors, closed the temples, destroyed the images?¹ For doing the same, king Josiah was preferred to his predecessors.²

39. Theodosius, therefore, abides in the light, and glories in the throngs of the saints.³ There, at this moment he is embracing Gratian, no longer sorrowing over his wounds because he has found his avenger. Gratian may have been carried off prematurely by a death he did not deserve, but he now possesses his soul at peace.⁴ There, the two men, each a good man, and each an industrious exponent of religious duty, rejoice together in the fellowship of the mercy they have shown [on earth]. Of them it can appropriately be said, *Day to day pours forth speech*.⁵ But, by contrast, Maximus and Eugenius are in hell, and just as *night to night declares knowledge*, so they teach by their wretched example how foolhardy it is for men to take up arms against their princes. Of such men it is fittingly said, *I have seen an irreligious man raised high and towering over the cedars of Lebanon: and I passed by again and behold! He was no more*.⁶ The pious man has crossed over from the darkness of the world into eternal light, and *the irreligious man was no more*, wicked as he was, he has ceased to exist.⁷

40. Now Theodosius⁸ of august memory has become truly aware that he is a ruler, now that he is in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and gazing upon

1 That is, Theodosius.

2 See 2 Kg. 23.4–25 and above c. 15. Note also that in the *De ob. Val. 57* Ambrose refers to Josiah in similar terms: ‘In the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah celebrated the Passover of the Lord in such a way that he exceeded in devotion the princes of earlier times ... the righteous king was preferred.’

3 See 1 Jn 2.10.

4 Gratian, the Emperor for whom Ambrose wrote *De fide* and to whom *Ep. ex. 4, 5* and *6* were addressed, who had indeed been responsible for making Theodosius his co-emperor, had died in 383, killed by the supporters of the usurper Maximus shortly after the start of his revolt. See Amm. Marc. 31.10.18–19; Zos. 4.36.5; Rufinus, *HE* 11.13. Ambrose himself also refers to the death of Gratian in his commentary on Ps. 61.17. On Ambrose’s relations with Gratian see above pp. 11–14 and below 246–47.

5 Ps. 19.2 (Vulg. 18.3).

6 Ps. 37.35–36 (Vulg. 36.35–36). ‘The cedars of Lebanon’ are the saints.

7 Cf. Ps. 37.36 (Vulg. 36.36).

8 The theme of the following chapters does not seem to follow on from c. 39. The interrupted argument is only resumed in c. 53. It has been plausibly, though not conclusively, argued that the intervening chapters are not part of the original speech, but a later addition by Ambrose. See also above pp. 174–75.

His temple.¹ Now he is a king in his own eyes, now that he also welcomes Gratian, his son,² and Pulcheria,³ the children so very dear to him, whom he had lost on earth; now that his Flacilla,⁴ a soul faithful to God, embraces him, now that he rejoices that his father⁵ has been restored to him; now that he embraces Constantine. Admittedly it was only in his final hours that Constantine was freed from all his sins by the grace of baptism, nevertheless because he was the first of the emperors to believe, and left to the princes after him an inheritance of faith, he has found a place (in heaven) which he very much deserves. In his time the following prophecy was fulfilled: *On that day that which is on the bridle of the horse will be holy to the Lord Almighty.*⁶ For this was what Helena of sainted memory, mother of Constantine, being filled with the spirit of God, uncovered.⁷

41. How fortunate was Constantine to have a mother like this, who when her son was emperor sought for him the support of divine protection, that he might take his place in battles unharmed, and be without fear of danger! How great was the woman, seeing that she found something to bestow on the emperor, which was very much greater than anything she could receive from him! A mother anxious for a son to whom rule of the Roman world had fallen, she sped to Jerusalem, and thoroughly examined the scene of the Lord's passion.

1 Cf. Ps. 27.4 (Vulg. 26.4).

2 See *Ep. ex.* 11.16–17 and p. 269 n. 6, which suggests that Theodosius had a short-lived son Gratian.

3 Daughter of Theodosius and Flacilla, who died in childhood; cf. *PLRE* 1.755.

4 First wife of Theodosius, and mother of Arcadius and Honorius; cf. *PLRE* 1.341–42.

5 The elder Theodosius, commander in chief in Africa, who was executed in obscure circumstances in 375; cf. *PLRE* 1.902–04, s.v. Theodosius 3.

6 Zech. 14.20. Jerome in his commentary on Zechariah, written in 406, denies that the line refers to the nails of the Cross.

7 For references to literature on this much-discussed episode see above p. 175 n. 5. What Ambrose has in effect done is to replace the visions of Constantine by Helena's discovery of the cross and her working the nails into imperial regalia. This in Ambrose's interpretation becomes the divine sign, calling not only Constantine but all subsequent Roman emperors to be Christian emperors and protectors of the Church. The finding of the cross sanctions the Christian empire just as the finding of the bones of martyrs sanctioned Ambrose's episcopate. We have no evidence for the bridle and the diadem earlier than this passage. They are mentioned subsequently in the ecclesiastical historians: Rufinus, *HE* 9.8; Socrates, *HE* 1.17; Sozomen, *HE* 2.1; Theodoret, *HE* 1.18. There is, I think, no evidence that objects claimed to be either the diadem (or helmet) or the bridle actually existed, in the way fragments of the cross were believed to exist, and were shown. It looks as if Ambrose has taken up a current story, and used it to demonstrate the Christian heritage of Roman emperors, and in doing this treated a legend as historical fact.

42. They claim that she was originally the hostess of an inn,¹ and as such known to the elder Constantius,² who subsequently obtained imperial office. Good hostess, who so painstakingly searched for the manger of the Lord! Good hostess, who knew about that inn-keeper who cared for the wounds of the man set upon by robbers!³ Good hostess, who preferred to be esteemed as dung in order to win Christ! That is why Christ raised her from the dung to royalty, according to what is written, that *He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the dung.*⁴

43. So Helena came, she began to visit the holy places once more. The Holy Spirit inspired her to search for the wood of the Cross. She approached close to Golgotha, and said: 'Behold, the place of combat, but where is the victory? I am looking for the banner of salvation, but I cannot find it. Am I,' she said, 'to be with kings, while the cross of the Lord lies in the dust? Am I to have gold all round me, while the triumph of Christ lies among rubble? While this object remains hidden, so does the palm of eternal life! How can I consider myself redeemed, if redemption itself is not visible?'

44. I see what you have done, Satan, to make sure that the sword which destroyed you was covered up. But Isaac dug out the wells, which had been covered up by foreigners, and did not permit the water to lie hidden.⁵ Therefore let the rubble be shifted so that life may be seen; let the sword be displayed by which the head of the true Goliath was cut off,⁶ let the earth be opened up so that salvation may shine forth. What did you achieve, Satan, by hiding the wood, other than to suffer a second defeat? Mary defeated you, when she gave birth to the conqueror, when without any impairment to her virginity⁷ she brought Him forth, who was crucified to conquer you, who died to subject you. You will be defeated again today, when a woman uncovers your snares. The holy one bore the Lord, I shall search for His cross. She gave proof of His birth, I shall give proof of His resurrection. She caused God to be seen among men; I shall raise the divine banner from the rubble to be a remedy for our sins.'

1 *Stabularia*, the feminine form of the word for innkeeper used in Latin version of the parable of the good Samaritan. Lewis and Short define *stabularius* as a host of the lowest kind, cf. n. 3 below.

2 Father of Constantine, see *PLRE* 1.227–28, s.v. Fl. Val. Constantius 12.

3 Lk. 10.34ff, the innkeeper described as *stabularius*.

4 Ps. 113.7 (Vulg. 112.7).

5 See Gen. 26.18.

6 See 1 Sam. 17.51.

7 Cf. *De virgin.* II.2.7.

45. So she opens up the earth; she clears away the soil; she lays bare three forked gibbets tangled together, which rubble had covered up, and the Enemy had concealed. But the triumph of Christ could not be effaced. Doubtfully, she hesitates, woman-like she hesitates, but the Holy Spirit inspires a particular line of investigation, because of the fact that two thieves had been crucified with the Lord.¹ So she picks out the middle piece of wood; but it was possible that the rubble had jumbled up the crosses and accidentally interchanged their positions. She goes back to the Gospel passage, she finds that on the middle gibbet there had been an inscription: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. From this, a true line of reasoning was deduced: the inscription revealed the cross of salvation. This is what *Pilate answered* to the Jews when they protested: *What I have written, I have written*² that is: 'I have not written these things to please you, but that future ages may know them, I have not written for you, but for posterity.' He was virtually saying, 'Let Helena have something to read, by which she can identify the cross of the Lord.'

46. So now, she found the inscription; she adored the king – most definitely not the wood, for this is Gentile error and the folly of the impious,³ but she adored Him, who hung on the tree, whose name was cited on the inscription, who like a scarab⁴ cried out so that His Father might forgive the sins of His persecutors. Eagerly the woman was in a hurry to touch the elixir of immortality, yet she was afraid to trample on the mystery of salvation. With joyful heart but hesitant footstep, she did not know what to do; she nevertheless made her way towards the resting place of truth. The wood shone, and grace sparkled, because just as previously Christ had visited a woman in the person of Mary, so now the Spirit visited a woman in the person of Helena. He taught her what being a woman she did not know,⁵ and led her on to a path that could not be known by any mortal.

47. She hunted for the nails with which the Lord was crucified, and found them. From one nail she ordered a bridle to be made, and from a second she

1 See Mt. 27.38.

2 See Jn 19.19–22.

3 Pagans argued that the reverence Christians showed to relics contradicted the claim that they worshipped only the one God.

4 Cf. *Ep.* 40.53 (Maur. 32); Habakuk 2.11 (Sept.). Faller thought that Ambrose is here using Origen, see *CSEL* 73.395 note on 46.4.

5 Does Ambrose mean inspiration to undertake the voyage to the Holy Land and to engage in various activities which fell outside the normal role of women?

fashioned a diadem; she converted one to ornamental, the other to devotional use. Mary was visited to set Eve free; Helena was visited so that emperors should be redeemed. That is why she sent to her son Constantine a diadem¹ brilliant with jewels, which were embedded in the more precious jewel of divine redemption bound in the iron of the cross; that is why she also sent the bridle. Constantine used both, and passed on the faith to subsequent rulers. Thus the holy object on the bridle is the foundation of the belief of emperors.² From this came faith, in order that persecution should end and true religion take its place.

48. Wisely did Helena act when she placed a cross on the head of kings so that the cross of Christ might be adored among rulers. It is not presumption but piety, when deference is shown to holy redemption. A good nail, then, this nail of the Roman empire, which rules the entire globe, and adorns the forehead of princes so that men who used to be persecutors might become preachers. It is right that the nail should be on the head, so that there should be protection where the mind is situated. On the forehead a crown, in the hands a bridle: a crown made from the cross, so that faith spreads its light; reins too from the cross so that power rules, but here is just government, not unjust enactment. Moreover, by the generosity of Christ our princes are to have the privilege that what has been said of the Lord can be said of the Roman emperor: *You have placed on his head a crown of precious stones.*³

49. On account of this, the Church manifests joy, the Jew blushes; not only does he blush but he is also tormented, because he is himself the author of his own confusion. While he insults Christ, he admits that Christ is king. He who did not believe admitted his own sacrilege when he hailed Him King of the Jews. 'See,' they say, 'we have crucified Jesus so that Christians shall not only rise after death, but reign though dead. We have crucified Him, whom kings adore; they adore him whom we do not adore. See, the very nail is held in reverence, and the man we marked down for death is the cure that offers salvation, and he torments demons by some unseen power. We thought that we had conquered, but admit ourselves conquered. Christ has risen again, and princes acknowledge that He has risen. He lives again unseen. Now for us the struggle is greater, now the battle against Him is

1 In the three ecclesiastical historians it is a helmet not a diadem. In Theodoret, *HE* 1.17, Helena has helmet and bridle made, but in Socrates, *HE* 1.17, and Sozomen, *HE* 2.1, the bridle and helmet are made on the order of Constantine, from nails he obtained from Helena.

2 This sums up the message of the Helena episode, cf. above p. 174.

3 Ps. 21.4 (Vulg. 20.3).

more furious. We have spurned Him upon whom kingdoms attend, whom the powerful serve. How shall we stand against kings? Kings bow before the iron of His fetters!¹ Kings worship him and yet the Photinians² deny His divinity! Emperors carry the nail of his cross on the front of their diadem, and yet the Arians belittle His power!

50. But I am asking: why is there *a holy thing upon the bridle*, unless it is to curb the arrogance of emperors, to check the wantonness of tyrants, who bray like horses at stud because they have got away with adultery without being punished? What terrible abuses do we read about as being committed by the Neros, the Caligulas and the rest, emperors who did not have *a holy thing upon the bridle*!

51. What, then, did the action of Helena's accomplish, when she took control of the reins, other than to say with the Holy Spirit to all emperors: *Do not become like the horse or mule*,³ and to control *with bridle and bit the mouths of those* who did not acknowledge that it was their duty as kings to rule the people subject to them. For power was rushing headlong into vice, and they defiled themselves with rampant lust like cattle. They were ignorant of God. The cross of the Lord was what checked them, and called them back from their fall into wickedness. It raised their eyes to seek Christ in heaven. They freed themselves from the bit of perfidy and took up the bridle of devotion and faith, following Him who said: *Take my yoke upon you; for my yoke is sweet, and my burden is light*.⁴ Hence, the succeeding emperors were Christian – except Julian alone, who abandoned the author of his salvation when he abandoned himself to the errors of philosophy – then came Gratian and Theodosius.

52. Prophecy, then, did not lie in saying *Kings will walk in Your light*.⁵ Assuredly *they will walk* and especially Gratian and Theodosius, princes at the forefront of the rest; protected now not by the weapons of soldiers but by their own merits; arrayed now not in purple robes, but in the mantle of glory. These men in this world took pleasure in pardoning many. How much happier will they be made in heaven by the memory of their pious actions,

1 Peter Walsh has suggested that *pedum* (of feet) of the text might be a transmission error for *compedum* (of fetters).

2 Followers of Photinus, a bishop of Sirmium, who taught that Father, Son and Spirit were a single person, cf. *Ep. ex.* 4.12.

3 Ps. 32.9 (Vulg. 31.9).

4 Mt. 11.29–30.

5 Is. 60.3.

as they recall the many that they have spared. These men now enjoy radiant light, having acquired far better dwellings there than those they used to occupy here, and saying, *O Israel, how great is your house, and how vast is the place of His possession! It is great and has no end.*¹ Men who have performed very heavy work say one to another: *It is good for a man, when he has borne a heavy yoke from his youth, he shall sit apart in silence, because he has borne a heavy yoke.*² For the man who has borne a heavy yoke from youth rests afterwards; far removed from the throng he now dwells in that privileged region where he has peace, saying, *for you alone, Lord, have settled me in hope.*³

53. Lazarus, a poor man, *bore a heavy yoke* from his youth, so now, on the evidence of God's writ, he rests apart in the bosom of Abraham.⁴ Theodosius *bore a heavy yoke* from youth when the men who had struck down his father in his triumph plotted against his safety.⁵ *He bore a heavy yoke* when he endured exile out of loyalty, when he took command after barbarians poured into the Roman Empire. *He bore a heavy yoke* in order to shift tyrants out of the Roman empire. But, because he laboured on earth, he rests in heaven.

54. But now let us set about the dispatch of the imperial body. You are weeping, Honorius, imperial offspring, and you are displaying filial sorrow with your tears. For you are sending the body of your father far away, a body which still has not been honoured with the honour of a tomb. But, in a comparable situation, the patriarch Jacob,⁶ because of the need to rescue his people, whom a dread famine was threatening with grave danger, left his home though an old man, and went off to a foreign land; and after he had died there he was escorted with his son in attendance, a journey of some days, back to the tomb of his fathers. And it did not in the least detract from

1 See Bar. 3.24ff. (*The Book of Baruch* is in *The New English Bible: the Apocrypha*, Oxford 1970, 252–58).

2 Lam. 3.27–28. The text here differs from Vulg. and RSV, but follows *Itala*.

3 Ps. 4.8 (Vulg. 4.10).

4 See Lk. 16.23.

5 Theodosius' father was executed at Carthage in 376, shortly after his defeat of Firmus, leader of the Moorish rebellion, evidently in the course of the manoeuvring that followed the death of Valentinian I. See H. Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux*, London and New York 1993, p. 208 n.16. Ambrose seems to imply here that Theodosius' own life was then also under threat. He retired to his estates in Spain until called upon by Gratian after Hadrianople, Paccatus, *Pan. Lat.* 2(12).9.1–10.2; Oros. 7.33.7

6 See Gen. 50.13.

his merit, rather it redounded to his renown that, denying himself his destined place of rest for the sake of his people, he was, as it were, in exile in a foreign country at the time of the funeral.

55. You are also weeping, august emperor, because you will not yourself accompany the honoured remains as far as Constantinople. The reason is the same for you and for us: we all accompany him with appropriate justified sorrow, we would all wish, if it were possible, to be pall-bearers with you. But Joseph went into a neighbouring province: in this case many intervening lands separate us, and there are seas to be crossed. And this would indeed not be difficult for you, if the good of the state did not hold you back, something which good emperors have put before both parents and children. In fact, you father made you emperor, the Lord confirmed you not merely to serve your father but to have command over all.

Do not be afraid that the triumphal relics will be received with less than conspicuous honour, wherever they arrive. This is not the sentiment of Italy, which has witnessed his spectacular triumphs; and which, set free from tyrants once more, acclaims the author of her freedom. This is not the sentiment of Constantinople, which has sent her prince to victory for a second time; though she wished to keep him, she could not. Indeed, she was anticipating triumphal celebrations and the emblems of victory on his return; she was anticipating the emperor of the entire world, surrounded by the army of Gaul, and supported by the might of the entire world. Yet now Theodosius is returning there more powerful, more glorious: a company of angels escorts him, a throng of saints accompanies him. Constantinople, you are surely blessed, you who are receiving a citizen of paradise, and will possess in the august lodging of his buried body an inhabitant of the kingdom of heaven.

LETTER ON THE DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS OF GERVASIUS AND PROTASIUS

EPISTULA 77 (MAUR. 22)

Introduction

For the date and context of this letter see the Introduction to *Epistulae* 75, 75a, 76 and 77.¹ McLynn has produced a vivid and plausible reconstruction of the events described.²

Translation

To the lady my sister, dearer than life and sight, from her brother.

1. As it is my custom not to leave your holiness uninformed of anything that is happening here in your absence I want you also to know that we have found holy martyrs. This was how: when I had consecrated the basilica,³ a large number of people as with one accord began to interrupt the proceedings shouting: Consecrate the basilica as you did the basilica *in Romana*!⁴ I replied: 'I will if I find relics of martyrs'. And immediately I felt a thrill as if of foresight.⁵

2. To be brief: the Lord was gracious to me. Though even the clergy were nervous, I ordered the area in front of the rails of Saints Felix and Nabor to be dug up.⁶ I found promising signs. When some persons were brought up

1 See above pp. 134–35.

2 McLynn 1994, 209–19.

3 The basilica which already was, and still is, known as the basilica Ambrosiana (S. Ambrogio).

4 Cf. Paul. V. *Ambr.* 32, now S. Nazaro. It was known as *in Romana* because it lies on the road from Milan to Rome.

5 According to Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 22.8, the martyrs were revealed in a dream.

6 In a martyrion probably situated in the western cemetery of Milan, like S. Ambrogio. On their translation by Bishop Maternus from Lodi early in the fourth century see Humphries 1999, 223–24.

DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS OF GERVASIUS AND PROTASIUS 205

on whom I was to perform the laying on hands, the martyrs began to make their presence felt to such effect that instantly, without a word from me, a woman was seized and flung headlong towards the site of the tomb. We found two men of amazing stature, such as were produced in the old days.¹ All the bones were intact. There was abundance of blood. There was a great thronging together of people throughout that two-day period. To be brief: we tidied up the remains, taking care to leave them intact and as evening was falling transferred them to the basilica of Fausta. All night there was a vigil and laying on of hands. On the following day we transferred the relics to the basilica which is known as the Ambrosian. During the transfer a blind man was healed.²

3. My sermon to the people was on these lines: When I was thinking about the overflowing and unprecedented numbers gathered together in your assembly, and the gifts of divine grace which have shone out from the holy martyrs, I found myself – I must admit it – unequal to my present duty: it did not seem possible to express in words something which could scarcely be grasped with the mind or perceived with the eyes. But at the beginning of today's reading from the holy scriptures, the Holy Spirit, who has spoken through the prophets, provided me with inspiration to think of something to say that is worthy of so great an assembly, of your expectations, and of the merits of the holy martyrs.

4. *The heavens*, says Scripture, *declare the glory of God*.³ When this psalm is being read the thought occurs to me that it is not so much heaven's physical structure, as actions deserving of heaven, which are seen to make a proclamation worthy of God. But today's reading happens to have revealed the true identity of *the heavens that declare the glory of God*. Cast your eyes to my right, cast your eyes to my left, on the most holy relics. Gaze on men who have lived a heavenly life. You are looking at the trophies won by a great soul!⁴ These are *the heavens that declare the glory of God*: these *the works of his hand which declare his firmament*.⁵ It was not the enticements of the world but the grace of divine working which raised these men to the firmament of their most sacred martyrdom, and which had much earlier

1 Did Ambrose remember Virgil, *Geor.* I.497?

2 On the discovery and miracles cf. Ambrose, *Hymn* 11 (Fontaine 487ff.) Paul. V. *Ambr.* 14; Augustine, *Conf.* 9.7.15.

3 Ps. 19.2 (Vulg. 18.2).

4 That is, Christ.

5 *Firmamentum*, 'support', 'underpinning' as well as 'firmament', 'heaven'.

proclaimed them witnesses to the faith, on the evidence of their character and behaviour, because they remained steadfast in the face of the treacherous conditions of this world.

5. Paul was a heaven, seeing that he said: '*Our dwelling is in the heavens*'.¹ James and John were heavens, that is why they were called *sons of thunder*,² and in the same sense John was a heaven when he saw *the word with God*.³ The lord Jesus himself was a heaven of everlasting light when he declared the glory of God, a glory which no one had ever seen before, and that is why he said '*No one has ever seen God: No one except the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the father, he has declared him*'.⁴

To continue, if you want to know what is meant by *the works of God's hands* attend to Job when he says: '*the divine spirit which made me*',⁵ for this was why, armed against the temptations of the devil, he was able to persist on the road of endurance without stumbling. But let us go on to the remaining verses.

6. The passage continues: *Day unto day proclaims the word*.⁶ Look, these here are the true days whom no gloom of night interrupts! Look at them, the true days, full of light and everlasting brilliance, proclaiming the word not in light-hearted chatter but from the innermost heart, steadfast in their confession of faith, persevering even in martyrdom.

7. Another psalm has been read which says: *Who is like the Lord our God who dwells on high, and is mindful of lowly things in heaven and on earth?*⁷ God is indeed mindful of lowly things, seeing that he has revealed the relics of holy martyrs of his church hidden under the humble turf; their souls are in heaven, but their bodies in the earth; *raising the needy from the earth and the poor man from the dung heap* – as you see them here – *to make them sit with the princes of his people*.⁸ By *princes of his people* whom are we to understand if not the holy martyrs, into whose ranks Protasius and Gervasius, though previously long unknown to us, have been promoted – these men who

1 Phil. 3.20.

2 Mk 3.17.

3 The Word is Christ. The allusion is to Jn 1.1: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

4 Jn 1.18.

5 Job 33.4.

6 Ps. 19.3 (Vulg. 18.3).

7 Ps. 113.5ff. (Vulg. 112). 5ff.

8 Ps. 113 (Vulg. 112.5ff.).

DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS OF GERVASIUS AND PROTASIUS 207

have caused the church of Milan, once barren of martyrs, now the mother of numerous sons, to rejoice in the glory and examples of their passion?¹

8. Nor should this verse be considered inconsistent with the true faith: *Day unto day proclaims the word*,² that means soul proclaims it to soul, life to life, resurrection to resurrection. And *night unto night declares Knowledge*,³ that is flesh makes its declaration to flesh: alluding to those whose martyrdom has declared to all their true knowledge of the faith. These are gracious nights, bright nights, which are star-lit. For as *star differs from star in brightness so it is with the resurrection of the dead*.⁴

9. It is not unreasonable that many persons are challenging this discovery of the resurrection of martyrs. I will nevertheless look to see whether what we have over there are incontrovertibly martyrs who have risen again. You have heard, no, you yourselves have seen that many persons have been cleansed from evil spirits, that very many, after they had merely touched the garment of the saints with their hands, have been freed from the sicknesses from which they were suffering. There has been a revival of the miracles of the days of old, when at the coming of our Lord Jesus a greater flood of grace poured on to the earth. You perceive how many have been healed by as it were the shadow of the bodies of the saints. How many handkerchiefs are being displayed, and how many garments covering the most holy relics are in demand as possessing healing in their very touch! All rejoice to touch even the outermost fringe, and whoever has touched it will be cured.

10. Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus, that in the holy martyrs you have raised for us such effective guardian spirits, at a time when your Church needs greater defenders. Let everybody take note what kind of champions I seek: champions who have the power to defend, but do not practise aggression. This kind of champions I have acquired for you, my holy people: champions to benefit everybody and harm no one. Such are the 'defenders'⁵ to whom I pay court, such the soldiers whom I maintain, that is, not soldiers of the world, but soldiers of Christ. I am not afraid that because of these any ill-will may arise against me. As far as they are concerned, the greater the services asked of them, the safer they are. I would wish even those persons who envy me these protectors to enjoy their protection. So let them come

1 Cf. Humphries 1999, 223–24.

2 Ps. 19.3 (Vulg. 18.3).

3 Ps. 19.2.

4 1 Cor. 15.41–42. A new idea introduced by association, perhaps an example of spontaneity.

5 *Defensores*.

and let them see my bodyguards. That I am surrounded by weapons of this kind, I do not deny. *Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God.*¹

11. The text of the divine Scripture tells how Elisha when he was besieged by a Syrian army told his fearful servant not to be afraid, '*because*', he said, '*more are for us than against us*',² and in order to prove his point he is reported to have prayed that the eyes of Gehazi should be opened. When they were opened he saw that the prophet was attended by innumerable armies of angels.³ As for us, although we cannot see them we sense their presence. These eyes were closed as long as the buried bodies of the saints remained hidden; the Lord opened our eyes, we see the auxiliaries by whom we have always been defended. We used not to see them but we had them nevertheless. And so because we were fearful, the Lord, as it were, told us: 'Look what mighty martyrs I have given you'. So with our eyes unsealed we look upon the glory of the Lord which is revealed in the passion of the martyrs long ago and their present marvellous power. Brethren, we have escaped no small burden of embarrassment: we used to have patrons and we did not know it. We have discovered this one respect in which we are seen to surpass our ancestors: the knowledge of the holy martyrs which they lost, we have regained.

12. The glorious relics are dug out of an inglorious tomb, the trophies are exhibited to heaven. The burial is moist with blood. The marks of the triumphant blood appear, the relics are found in their proper place and arrangement, the heads torn from the shoulders. Now old men relate that they had sometime or other heard the names of these martyrs, and read their inscriptions. The city which stole the martyrs of others⁴ had lost its own. Although this is a gift of God, I cannot deny the act of grace which the Lord Jesus conferred on the times of my episcopacy; because I do not deserve to be a martyr, I have acquired these martyrs for you.

13. Let the triumphant victims take their place where Christ himself is the sacrifice, but he above the altar, since he has suffered for all, they below it since they have been redeemed by his suffering. In fact I had designed this place for myself, for it is right that a priest should repose where he was wont

1 Ps. 20.7 (Vulg. 19.8).

2 2 Kg. (4 Kings Vulg.) 6.16.

3 This passage is also alluded to in *Ep.* 75a.11, and 51.5.

4 On the 'importation' of the martyrs see note 6 above p. 204.

DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS OF GERVASIUS AND PROTASIUS 209

to make his offering.¹ But I yield the right-hand site to the holy victims. That place was owed to the martyrs. Let us therefore bury the sacred relics, and carry them to a resting place worthy of them, and let us celebrate the whole day with loyal devotion.

14. The people responded with an acclamation that the burial of the martyrs should be put off until Sunday, but in the end agreement was reached that it should take place on the following day. On the following day I preached to the people a second time:

15. Yesterday I discussed the verse *day unto day proclaims the word*² as far as the understanding of my brain could take it. Today it seems to me that the divine scriptures have not only made prophecies in the past but are doing so in the present too. For when I watch the great celebration of your holiness³ continuing day and night, the oracles of the prophetic song proclaim that today and yesterday are the days of which it is said, most aptly: *day unto day proclaims the word*, and these the nights of which it is asserted, most fittingly, that *night unto night declares knowledge*.⁴ For what have you been doing for the last two days with the most heartfelt sincerity if you have not proclaimed the word of God, and given proof of your knowledge of the faith?

16. But that celebration of yours is resented by the usual people,⁵ and because with their jealous minds they cannot bear your celebration, they hate the reason for the celebration, and go so far in their madness as to deny that the martyrs had any merits, though even evil spirits acknowledge their actions. But this is not surprising, seeing that the perversity of the unbelievers is so great that even the confession of the devil is generally preferable. For the devil used to say: '*Jesus, son of the living God, why have you come to torment us before the time?*'⁶ And although the Jews heard this they nevertheless rejected the son of God. And even now you have heard the evil spirits shouting and confessing to the martyrs that they were unable to bear the punishment, and saying: 'Why have you come to torture us so severely?' And the

1 Burial near martyrs was popular. Ambrose's brother Satyrus was buried next to S. Victor, in an older chapel, near S. Ambrogio, to which it has now been joined. But for a living bishop to prepare to be buried under the altar was to say the least unusual. See J.-C. Picard, *Le souvenir des évêques*, Rome 1988, 45–46. The relics of Ambrose are still there under the altar of S. Ambrogio.

2 Ps. 19.3 (Vulg. 18.3).

3 That is, the plebs – 'of you the most pious people'.

4 Ps. 19.3 (Vulg. 18.3).

5 The Arians.

6 Mt. 8.29.

Arians say: 'Those people are not martyrs, neither can they torture the devil, nor set anyone free', although the torments of the evil spirits are made known by their own voices, and the benefits of the martyrs are declared by cures of those healed, and the testimonies of those set free.¹

17. They deny that the blind man has been given back his sight, but he does not deny that he has been healed. He says: 'I see, who used not to see', he says: 'I have ceased to be blind', and he proves it by his action. They who cannot deny the action, deny the benefit. The man is well known. When he was well he was obligated to public duties. Severus was his name, a butcher by trade. He had given up his occupation after the disability had befallen him. He calls in evidence the men by whose dutiful assistance he had previously been supported. He summons as witnesses of his recovered sight the same men whom he had to give evidence and testimony of his blindness. He shouts that as soon as he touched the fringe of a garment of the martyrs with which the sacred relics were covered, light was restored to him.

18. Surely this incident is similar to the one which we read about in the Gospel. For we are praising the power of one single author, and it does not make any difference whether it is a 'work' or a 'gift',² since a work is given and a gift performed. For what He has given to some the power to do, His name works in the work of the others. So we read in the gospel that when the Jews saw the restoration to health in the case of that blind man they demanded proof from the parents. They kept asking: '*How is it that your son sees?*', when he kept saying: '*although I was blind now I see*'.³ This is also what our man says: 'I was blind and now I see, ask others if you do not believe me, ask strangers so that you do not think my parents are in league with me'. The obstinacy of those people here (the Arians) is more detestable than that of the Jews. When the latter doubted, they went as far as to interrogate the parents; the Arians make their inquiries in secret, but in public they deny the facts, no longer disbelieving the work, but the author.

19. But I ask what is it that they do not believe, is it that anyone at all can be healed by martyrs? That would be to disbelieve Christ, for he himself said: '*And you will do greater works than these*'.⁴ Or is it that they cannot be healed by these particular martyrs, whose merits have been honoured for a

1 The incident is described in Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 14.

2 *Opus* and *munus*. Jesus' healing of the blind man was his own work. The martyrs' healing power was Jesus' gift – but it was his work too, because he worked through them.

3 Jn 9.25.

4 Jn 14.12.

DISCOVERY OF THE RELICS OF GERVASIUS AND PROTASIUS 211

long time, whose bodies have been found only recently? At this point I ask whether it is me that they envy, or the holy martyrs. If me, is it because some miracles are worked by me? By some action of mine? By my name?

20. Why then do they envy me something that is not mine? If they envy the martyrs – for there is no alternative, if they do not envy me, they clearly envy the martyrs – they prove that the martyrs had another faith than the one they hold themselves. For they would not envy them [the martyrs] their marvellous works, if they had not concluded that the faith of the martyrs was precisely the faith which they themselves do not have, namely that faith which has been confirmed by the tradition of our ancestors, and which even evil spirits cannot deny, though the Arians deny it.

21. We have today heard those who have received the laying on of hands saying that nobody can be saved unless he believes in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that he is dead, he is everlastingly buried, who denies the Holy Spirit, who does not believe in the all-encompassing power¹ of the holy Trinity. The devil confesses this, but the Arians refuse to admit it. The devil says: 'Let him be tortured, just as he who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit was tortured by the martyrs'.

22. I do not accept evidence given by the devil but I accept his confession. The devil spoke unwillingly, under compulsion and torture. What wickedness suppresses, pain exacts. The devil yields to blows, and yet up to now Arians do not know how to yield. How much they have suffered, and how much like Pharaoh they are hardened by their misfortunes.² The devil used to say as we read in the scriptures: '*I know you who you are, you are the son of the living God*'.³ The Jews used to say: '*We do not know who he is*'.⁴ Today and yesterday and last night the evil spirits said: 'We know that you are martyrs'; and the Arians say: 'We do not know, we do not want to understand, we do not want to believe'. The evil spirits say to the martyrs: 'You have come to ruin us'; the Arians say: 'the torments of the evil spirits are not real, they are pretended, a made up comedy'. I have heard of many things being made up, but this is something nobody has ever succeeded in pretending, that he was acting the part of an evil spirit. Why do we see those who have experienced the laying on of hands become so agitated? Where is the opportunity for deceit here? Where any suggestion of acting?

1 *Virtutem*.

2 Cf. *Ep. ex.* 7–11.

3 Mk 1.24.

4 Jn 9.29.

23. It is not that I am making use of the voice of demons to vindicate the martyrs; from their own good works let their holy martyrdom be proved. Martyrdom has its proper judges, the persons who have been cured; its proper witnesses, those who have been set free. There is a superior advocacy, spoken by the restored health of those who came to the martyrs sick; a superior advocacy, that uttered by blood. For blood has a melodious voice which reaches from earth to heaven. You have read that God said: *'The blood of your brother is crying out to me'*.¹ And this blood does cry out in the clarion of its colour, this blood cries out in the declaration of its power, this blood cries out in the triumph of its suffering.² Your petition that we postpone the burial of the relics from yesterday until today has been fulfilled.³

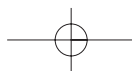
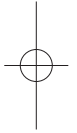
1 Gen. 4.10.

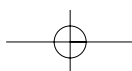
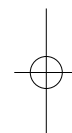
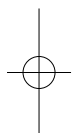
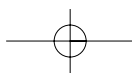
2 *Passio*.

3 The people originally asked for delay of a week (see above c. 14). Ambrose favoured haste. McLynn 1994, 213, argues that he feared the growth of scepticism regarding his claim to have found martyrs. But he delayed the burial one day. His final words are equivalent to 'you asked for postponement and you have got it'.



LETTERS OUTSIDE THE COLLECTION
(EPISTULAE EXTRA COLLECTIONEM)





NOTE ON *EPISTULAE EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 1 AND 1a

The first group of *Epistulae extra collectionem* opens with a letter to Ambrose's sister Marcellina (*Ep. ex.* 1) which is followed by a letter to the emperor Theodosius (*Ep. ex.* 1a). Both letters concern the affair of the burnt synagogue at Callinicum in Mesopotamia, and Ambrose's efforts to ensure that the perpetrators should escape punishment. Neither letter will be found here among the *Epistulae extra collectionem*. *Ep. ex.* 1 (Maur. 41) has been placed among the letters of Book Ten, next to *Ep.* 74, which it supplements.¹ The letter to Theodosius has come down to us as the second letter in the first group of *Epistulae extra collectionem* (*Ep.* 1a Maur. 40), as well as in as *Ep.* 74 in Book Ten.² It is agreed that *Ep. ex.* 1a, the version outside the *Collection*, is the original one, and that it has been edited for the *Collection*.³ Alterations are on the whole slight and mainly stylistic. The letter therefore needed to be translated only once, and in the version found in Book Ten. Where the text of *Ep.* 74 differs from that of *Ep. ex.* 1a the alterative version is given in brackets. The modifications do, however, include one correction of fact, and a very significant new final sentence. In the version in the *Collection* Ambrose declares that he would raise the matter publicly in church, if the emperor ignored the letter. In other words he gives advance warning that he will deliver a sermon like the one transmitted as *Ep. ex.* 1. This sentence was not in the original letter. One wonders why Ambrose added it. Perhaps he wanted to remind readers of the *Collection* that he did in fact preach that sermon, even if they will not find it in the *Collection*? Or did he perhaps add the sentence to link the letter to the emperor (*Ep.* 74) to the letter to his sister (*Ep. ex.* 1) with the intention (later abandoned) of including both letters in the *Collection*? At any rate the added sentences significantly changes the tone of the original.

1 See above pp. 112–23.

2 See above pp. 97–111.

3 See Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.10.3, xxi–xxii

LETTERS TO THEODOSIUS I ON HIS VICTORY OVER THE USURPER EUGENIUS

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 2 (MAUR. 67): AMBROSE TO THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS (394)

Introduction

Epp. ex. 2 and 3 were written in September AD 394 after Theodosius had defeated the usurper Eugenius at the battle of the Frigidus in the Julian Alps on 6 September 394. Ambrose had left Milan when Eugenius was about to arrive there.¹ *Ep. ex.* 2 is Ambrose's reply to a letter of Theodosius asking him to hold a service of thanksgiving. Ambrose was glad to conduct the service. The letter also shows that the resumption of relations between Ambrose and the emperor after the usurpation was not quite straightforward. For Ambrose felt it necessary to reassure Theodosius that he had never doubted that the usurper would be defeated, as well as to point out that the fact that he had spent some months away from Milan was because he did not want to be in the same town as the usurper, and that it therefore did not amount to desertion of his congregation.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 2*

Ambrose to the emperor Theodosius.

You thought, most blessed emperor, as I learnt from your august letter, that I was a long way from the city of the Milanese.² But I was not so ignorant of

1 On Ambrose's relations with Eugenius see *Ep. ex.* 10 (Maur. 57) in which Ambrose announces and explains his departure to Eugenius, together with the comments of McLynn 1994, 344–47.

2 The Maurist edition continues: 'because I believed your cause was forsaken by God,' a phrase inserted by the editors of 1585 because it seemed required by the meaning, though has Zelzer has rejected it. But the following sentence certainly implies that something of the kind

THEODOSIUS I VICTORY OVER THE USURPER EUGENIUS 217

your moral qualities and your deserts as to have the slightest doubt that divine support would be on the side of your Piety, and assist you to free the Roman empire from the savagery of a barbarian bandit,¹ and from the enthronement of an unworthy usurper.²

1. I speedily returned to Milan after I had learned that the man whom I had thought it right to shun, had left Milan. For I had not deserted the Church of the Milanese which the Lord's judgement had entrusted to me,³ but I was avoiding the presence of one who was contaminated with sacrilege.⁴ So I returned around the first of August. Since then I have been in residence here, and it was here that the august letter of your Clemency found me.

2. Thanks be to the Lord our God who has responded to your faith and your piety and has brought back a pattern of ancient sanctity, so that we see happening in our own time what we marvel at when we read about it in the scriptures. For divine help has been so effectively present in your battles that no mountain ranges could delay the progress of your advance, and the arms of the enemy did not present any kind of obstacle.⁵

3. You have decided that for these things I am to render thanks to the Lord our God. I will do so gladly, being aware of your worthiness. It is certain that a victim⁶ is pleasing to God if it is offered in your name, which evokes such devotion and such faith. Other emperors in order to inaugurate a victory order the erection of triumphal arches or other marks of triumph. Your Clemency gets ready a victim for the Lord, and wishes an offering and thanksgiving to be offered by bishops to the Lord.

4. Although I am unworthy and unequal to so great a task as the celebration of so important a solemn thanksgiving,⁷ I write to you what I have done. I carried the letter of your Piety with me to the altar. I placed it on the altar. I

was in Theodosius' letter. Theodosius must have suggested that Ambrose stayed away from Milan because he doubted whether Theodosius would defeat the usurper.

1 The general Arbogast, see *PLRE* 1, 95–97, s.v. Arbogastes.

2 Eugenius, see *PLRE* 1, 293 s.v. Fl. Eugenius 6.

3 The implication is that Theodosius had criticised Ambrose for deserting his see.

4 The 'sacrilege' are the concessions Eugenius is said to have made to pagan senators. See *Ep. ex.* 10, pp. 256–61 below.

5 This is an allusion to the 'miraculous' gale which gave the forces of Theodosius victory in the battle of the Frigidus. See Sozomen, *HE* 7.24; Socrates, *HE* 5.25. Theodosius' piety has been rewarded by God as the piety of biblical leaders, notably Moses, was rewarded when he was leading the Israelites to the Promised Land (cf. Ambrose, *Expl. ps.* 36.25.2–4).

6 I.e. the eucharist.

7 *Tantum votorum*.

held it in my hand as I offered the sacrifice, so letting your faith speak with my voice, and the imperial letter itself perform the role of the priestly offering.¹

5. The Lord is indeed gracious to the Roman empire, seeing that he has chosen an emperor, and father of emperors,² whose valour and power, though exalted to so high a summit of imperial triumph are so grounded in humility that he surpasses other emperors in valour, and priests in humility. What more should I desire, what is there left to long for? You have everything. So it is on account of your merits³ that all my prayers will be answered. You are pious, emperor. You are merciful to the highest degree.

6. Yet I still pray that you may ever continue to grow in piety. For God has granted no gift more excellent than this. And therefore bring about by your clemency that the Church of the Lord while showing its joy that there is peace and tranquillity for the innocent, will also be able to rejoice at the pardoning of the guilty. Above all, forgive those who have sinned also against yourself!⁴

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 3 (MAUR. 62)
AMBROSE TO THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS (394)⁵

Introduction

One reason for sending the letter was clearly to introduce his deacon Felix to Theodosius, 'because he deserves it'. The main business of this letter is obviously to urge Theodosius to pardon followers of the defeated usurper Eugenius.⁶ One theme running through the letter is an apology for writing more letters to Theodosius than Theodosius had written to him, for not having limited himself to the equal exchange of letter, which was required by

1 Symbolically demonstrating that this mass expressed the emperor's personal gratitude. The rite is without precedent, cf. M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, Cambridge 1986, 108–09.

2 *Princeps et parens principum*: the reference is to Theodosius' two sons, Arcadius and Honorius.

3 *Ex tuis*.

4 As we also can see from *Ep. ex. 3* the victory of Theodosius aroused widespread fear of Theodosius' revenge on real and supposed supporters of Eugenius. Ambrose therefore urges clemency. The question of what was to be done to the followers of Eugenius remained controversial, but in the end clemency prevailed. See *On the Death of Theodosius* 4, above p. 178 and notes.

5 Autumn 394, later than *Ep. 2*, but before the emperor's arrival at Milan.

6 They were in fact pardoned, whether already by Theodosius, or by his son Honorius on Theodosius's request. See above p. 179 n. 4.

THEODOSIUS I VICTORY OVER THE USURPER EUGENIUS 219

the conventions of epistolary etiquette. Theodosius had written after his victory, asking for a mass of thanksgiving, and Ambrose had replied with *Ep. ex. 2*. Since then Ambrose had written a second letter, which was carried by the chamberlain, and finally the present letter. Ambrose was understandably anxious to resume relations with Theodosius. He did not restrict himself to letters. Shortly after writing this letter he travelled to Aquileia to plead personally with the emperor for the imprisoned followers of Eugenius.¹

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM*
3 (MAUR. 62)**

Ambrose to Theodosius the emperor.

1. Although I recently wrote to your august Clemency for a second time, it was not² enough to have returned the courtesy³ letter for letter, for I have been laid under an obligation by so many favours on the part of your Clemency that I cannot repay what I owe you, most august emperor, with no matter how many tokens of dutiful respect.

2. Therefore just as I could not miss the first opportunity to give thanks to your Clemency, and to pay you the respect of my address through the chamberlain,⁵ not least in case it was thought that idleness, and not duress,⁴ was the reason for my not writing at an earlier time, so now I had to find a reason for sending you the respectful greeting which I owe to your Piety.

3. So I sent my son, the deacon Felix,⁶ because he deserves it, to carry my letter to perform the respectful duty in my place, to appeal also on behalf of those who have sought refuge with the mother of your Piety, the Church, pleading for mercy.⁷ Against the tears of these people I could not hold out without anticipating the arrival of your Clemency with this my petition.

1 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 31.1.

2 *Non* was inserted by the editor of 1585 and omitted by Zelzer. I cannot make sense of the letter without it.

3 *Officium*.

4 The letter has not been preserved.

5 The allusion is to the period when Eugenius was at Milan. Ambrose claims that he was then not allowed to write to Theodosius.

6 Probably this Felix is identical with the recipient of several other letters of Ambrose, who some time after Ambrose's death became bishop of Bologna (Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 46).

7 Individuals compromised by cooperating with Eugenius.

4. It is a great thing that we are asking. But we are asking it from one to whom the Lord has granted unprecedented and amazing favours,¹ whose clemency we know, and whose piety we hold as a pledge.² But we admit to having still greater hopes of you. Since you have recently surpassed yourself in courage, you ought now also to surpass yourself in piety. For your victory is thought to have been bestowed on you in the way of old through miracles of the ancient kind,³ as it was on holy Moses, and holy Joshua the son of Nun, on Samuel and on David,⁴ not by human judgement, but by an outpouring of heavenly grace. We are calling for piety to match the piety which was rewarded by your great victory.

1 Above all the defeat of the usurpers Maximus and Eugenius.

2 A hint that unless Theodosius shows clemency now, he will cancel out his earlier acts of piety.

3 Theodosius' defeat of Eugenius in the battle of the river Frigidus was decisively assisted by a sudden gale that blew in to the faces of Eugenius' soldiers. This was seen as a divine miracle, sent to reward the piety of Theodosius and to defeat a usurper, who had tolerated a resurgence of Roman paganism (*De ob. Theod.* 10).

4 E.g. Ex. 1.14; Jos. 10.12–14; 1 Sam. 16.6–13.

LETTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF AQUILEIA (AD 381)

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 4 (MAUR. 10) = *GESTA CONCILII AQUILEIENSIS EP. 2*, THE BISHOPS OF THE COUNCIL TO THE EMPERORS GRATIAN, VALENTINIAN II, AND THEODOSIUS I

Introduction: Enforcing the decisions of the Council of Aquileia

The decisions of the council of Constantinople were given legal force by the imperial law of 31 July 381.¹ The council of Aquileia met on 3 September 381.² We do not know for how long it remained in session. After the decisions had been reached the bishops, or most likely Ambrose writing for the bishops, wrote a series of letters to the emperors asking them to enforce the decisions of the council. The *Epistulae extra collectionem* include five letters written in the name of the Council asking the emperors to enforce the decisions of the Council.³ Two of these, *Ep. ex.* 4 (Maur. 10) and *Ep. ex.* 5 (Maur. 11) call for action by Gratian. But *Epp. ex.* 6 (Maur. 12), 8 (Maur. 14) and 9 (Maur. 13) call for action by Theodosius, and what is more they reopen questions that had already been settled with some difficulty at the council of Constantinople. While these letters were written in the name of the bishops of the synod, it has been generally assumed that Ambrose is their author, not only because they have been transmitted among his letters, but also because scholars believe that they can recognise Ambrose's political style.⁴

In *Ep. ex.* 4 the bishops who had met in September 381 at Aquileia, under the presidency of Bishop Valerian of Aquileia, report formally to the three emperors, but really to Gratian. They thank the emperors for summoning the

¹ *CTh* 16.1.3.

² *Acta* 1. On the council of Aquileia see McLynn 1994, 102–37.

³ A sixth letter, *Acta* 1 (Maur. 9), was only published together with the *Acta* of the Council, and not with either collection of letters.

⁴ On the whole series see Pietri 1976, 860–66.

council and ask them to enforce its decisions, namely to depose Palladius, the *Homoian* bishop of Ratiaria (mod. Arčar) and Secundianus, *Homoian* bishop of Singidunum (mod. Belgrade), and to banish from Italy Julius Valens, the exiled *Homoian* bishop of Poetovio (mod. Pettau / Ptuj). Gratian summoned a council which was originally intended to be a general one, a western parallel to the council of Constantinople of 381. But it was eventually attended by only 34, mainly North Italian, bishops, supporters of Ambrose, who were led by Ambrose to condemn his *Homoian* opponents.¹

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM*
4 (MAUR. 10)**

To the most clement emperors, and the most blessed Christian princes² Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius the holy council that met at Aquileia sends this address.³

1. Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave you the Roman empire, and blessed be our Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten son of God, who safeguards your kingdom with his devotion,⁴ before whom we give thanks to you most clement princes because you have proved the zeal of your faith. For in order to abolish dissension you directed that a council of bishops should be assembled, and in your condescension you honoured the bishops with the choice, so that no one who wanted to attend should be absent, and nobody was compelled to attend unwillingly.

2. And so we assembled in accordance with your humane direction without the rancour of large numbers, and with zeal for debate, and none of the bishops were found to belong to the heretics, except only two, Pal-

¹ See McLynn 1994, 112–13, 123–26.

² *Principibus*: cf. p. 63, *Ep.* 72 n. 3 and glossary s.v. *princeps*.

³ Though formally addressed to all the emperors it is in fact addressed to Gratian, by the bishops of the council of AD 381.

⁴ *Pietate sua*.

⁵ Palladius, bishop of Ratiaria, was attacked by Ambrose without being named in the first two books of *De fide*, and wrote a fierce counter-attack. He defended himself vigorously and skilfully at the council of Aquileia, and wrote an *Apology* in which he attacked Ambrose's handling of that council. See Gryson 1980, 81–140, 264–32, cf. McLynn 1994, 112–13, 125–37.

ladius⁵ and Secundianus,¹ names of long-established infidelity,² on account of whom Romans from the remotest regions of the world were demanding the assembly of a council. And note that the council lacked nothing, even though nobody was compelled to attend who, weighed down by old age and venerable just for his white hair, would have had to leave a home on the furthest recesses of the Ocean. No man dragging along a feeble body burdened by years of fasting was forced by the hardships of the journey to weep at the disability of his lost strength. No one, finally, mourned his poverty, a glorious thing in a bishop, because he was without means for the journey.³ So it was fulfilled in you Gratian, most clement of emperors, what the holy Scripture has praised: *blessed is he who considers the needy and the poor.*⁴

3. How serious would it be if because two bishops⁵ are rotten in their lack of religion, all churches in the whole world had been deprived of their supreme priests? Yet even though these bishops were unable to come themselves because of the length of the journey, nevertheless nearly all bishops from nearly all western provinces were present in the person of deputies, and they made known by incontrovertible attestations that they hold what we declare, and that they agree with the decisions of the council of Nicaea, as the attached documents prove.⁶ So now the prayers of the people everywhere are uniformly for your empire, and furthermore⁷ as a result of your decision⁸ there has been no shortage of advocates of the faith. For even though the teachings of our ancestors, from which it is impious and sacrilegious to depart, are perfectly clear, we did offer them⁹ an opportunity for debate.

1 'Arian' bishop of Singidunum who succeeded Ursacius around 366, interrogated by Ambrose at Aquileia, see *Acta* 65–75.

2 *Perfidiae*.

3 Ambrose successively praises Gratian for not compelling attendance, for providing public transport, and for paying a subsistence allowance to bishops. In fact the small scale of the council represented a political defeat for Gratian. It signalled the emancipation of his eastern colleague Theodosius. See McLynn 1994, 124.

4 Ps. 41.1 (Vulg. 40.1).

5 Palladius and Secundianus.

6 This suggests that the *Acta* of the council were sent with this letter, though the extract from the *Acta* which has been preserved does not include such a formal attestation.

7 *Tamen* here seems not to be used adversatively.

8 *Arbitrio vestro*: the decision to hold the council?

9 Palladius and Secundianus.

4. And first of all we discussed the ultimate origin of the controversy, and decided that there should be a reading of the letter of Arius,¹ who is found to be the originator of the heresy, which is why the heresy has taken its name from him.² The purpose of this was that as these men are in the habit of denying that they are Arians, they should either condemn the Arian blasphemies by denouncing the letter, or they should find arguments to defend it, or at least not refuse the name of a man whose impiety and lack of religion they followed. But these people, though they had themselves challenged us to a debate within three days,³ and, though they even arrived at the conference at the arranged place, which we had not expected, after insisting they could easily prove that they were Christians, something that we readily accepted, and very much wanted them to prove, all of a sudden, because they were neither able to condemn their founder, nor to vindicate him, began to evade the encounter,⁴ and to refuse the debate.⁵

5. Nevertheless we had much conversation with them. The divine Scriptures were set up between us. They were given an opportunity to debate from sunrise to the seventh hour of the day.⁶ We showed patience. Would that they had said little, or at any rate that we could wipe out what we heard! For although Arius stated with sacrilegious words that the Father was alone eternal, alone good, alone true God, alone God everlasting, intending by this impious commendation to imply that the son was devoid of these things, these fellows nevertheless chose to follow Arius, rather than to allow the Son of eternal God to be confessed to be true God, and good, wise and powerful God, and God everlasting. We spent many hours in vain. Their impiety kept getting worse, and there was no means by which it could be remedied.

1 The letter of Arius to Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, of c.320 is printed in Opitz, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites*, 12, no 6. Ambrose insists that the *Homoians* are followers of Arius, and tried to browbeat them either to admit this, or to condemn Arius' views as contained in the letter. They refuse to do either.

2 See *Acta* 5ff. There is a full discussion in McLynn 1994, 129–33.

3 Cf. *Acta* 11.

4 See *Acta* 12. This does not mean that they left the place, but that they refused to answer the loaded questions Ambrose was forcing them to answer. For a reconstruction of the events of the council, of which this is a highly tendentious account it, is essential to use fragment's of Palladius' *Apology* in Gryson 1980, 264–365, as McLynn has done (1994, 127–37).

5 The point is that Palladius and Secundianus expected a debate about the faith, while Ambrose intended to conduct, and did indeed conduct, a trial in which Palladius and Secundianus were charged with Arian heresy.

6 The early session is reported only by Palladius, see Gryson 1980, cs. 90–97.

6. Finally, when they realised that they were being driven into a corner by the sacrilegious statements in Arius's letter, which we have appended so that your Clemency too might be shocked, they jumped up in the middle of the reading of the letter, and demanded that we should reply to some points of their own. Though it was neither right nor reasonable that we should interrupt our proceeding, and though we had previously given the reply that they must first condemn the impious doctrines of Arius, and that then at the proper time and place we would answer whichever of their propositions they wished, nevertheless we now gave in to their absurd wish. At that point they falsified the words of the gospel and put it to us that the Lord had said: *He who sent me is greater than I*,¹ though the context in the holy Scriptures² shows that what was written is different.

7. For though they were convicted of falsehood to the point that they have admitted it,³ they could not be corrected by reason. For when we were saying that it was in respect of his taking flesh upon him that the Son is said to be less than his Father, but that in respect of his Godhead he is proved by the testimony of the Scriptures to be his Father's equal, nor could there be any distinction of rank or greatness, where there was a unity of power, these people not only refused to amend their error, but even began to increase their madness, so that they said that the Son was inferior even in respect of his Godhead, as if there could possibly be any inferiority of God in respect of his Godhead, and finally went as far as to relate his death not to the mystery of our salvation, but to a certain weakness of his Godhead.

8. We were shocked, O most clement princes, at such dreadfully sacrilegious sayings, and such perverse teachers. So that they can no longer deceive the people whom they were governing, we judged that they ought to be deposed from their priesthood, since they were in agreement with the impious doctrines of the pamphlet put before them.⁴ Nor is it right that they should claim for themselves the priesthood of him whom they have denied. We therefore appeal to your faith and to your glory to show the respect of your imperial office to Him who gave it you,⁵ and that you decree that

1 *Acta* 33ff. Palladius' citation combines Jn 14.28 and 6.44. See *Acta* 33ff.

2 *Series scripturarum*.

3 See *Acta* 35ff. Palladius did not actually produce arguments to refute Ambrose's interpretation of the biblical passages, but he clearly did not for a moment think that they disproved his literal interpretation of Jn 14.28: 'He who sent me is greater than I'.

4 The letter of Arius.

5 *Auctori*.

through the instrument of letters of your Clemency to competent courts these advocates of impiety and corruptors of truth are to be banished from the threshold of the Church, in order that bishops that are indeed holy can be chosen in place of the condemned men by delegates of our humble selves.

9. The same sentence should also include the priest¹ Attalus,² who has admitted his offence, and who adheres to the impious doctrines of Palladius. For what are we to say of his teacher Julianus Valens,³ who although he was in the neighbourhood, refused to attend the priestly council, in case he might be compelled to account to the bishops for the overthrow of his country and the ruin of his fellow citizens.⁴ This man, even, so it is said, dared to appear in view of a Roman army wearing a collar and bracelets, dressed in the manner of tribesmen,⁵ being desecrated by Gothic impiety,⁶ behaviour which without any doubt is sacrilege, not only in a bishop, but in anybody who is a Christian. For it is inconsistent with the custom of the Romans, even if the priests of Gothic idolatry possibly appear like this.

10. Let your Piety be moved by the title of bishop, which is disgraced by this blasphemer, a man who is convicted of an unspeakable crime even by his own people, if any of them are left. At any rate let him go home, and not pollute the most flourishing cities of Italy. Now he is using unlawful ordinations to attach to himself persons like himself, and through the agency of these abandoned wretches to leave behind a nursery of his own impiety and irreligion, thought he has not even begun to be a bishop. For he had first been appointed at Poetovio in place of the saintly Marcus, a bishop of admirable memory. Subsequently he was deposed in disgrace by the people.

1 A presbyter, as it seems, apart from Palladius and Secundianus and some shorthand writers, the only *Homoian* at the council.

2 According to *Acta* 44–45 he refused to answer whether he had once subscribed to the creed of Nicaea.

3 Arian bishop of Poetovio, after replacing the orthodox Marcus. He was later exiled to Italy, and came to Milan perhaps c.378, and there became a leader of the Arians. Allied to Ursinus, the unsuccessful rival of Pope Damasus, he caused much trouble to Ambrose (*Ep. ex.* 5.3 (Maur. 11)).

4 The implication is that he betrayed the city to the Goths. The reader of this letter would assume that the city was Poetovio, Valens' see, but according to *Coll. Avell.* 39.4 it was Mursa/Osijek.

5 *More gentiliū*.

6 *Impietas Gothica*, which could mean either 'Gothic paganism' or 'Gothic heresy' i.e. Arianism, just as *more gentiliū* could mean 'in the fashion of the tribesmen' but also 'of the pagans'. Ambrose is deliberately ambiguous.

This man who could not remain at Poetovio, now throws his weight about¹ at Milan, after the overthrow, let us not say betrayal, of his own country.

11. Let your piety therefore deign to deal with all these matters, otherwise it will appear that that we assembled in obedience to the directives of your Serenity to no purpose. For we must make sure not only that our decisions are not treated with contempt, but also that yours are not. We therefore petition your Clemency to give a fair hearing to the delegates of the council, who are saintly men, and to instruct them to return speedily with the actions which we demand accomplished, so that you receive your reward from our Lord Jesus Christ, whose churches you have cleansed of every stain of sacrilege.

12. As for the Photinians,² concerning whom you decreed in an earlier law that they must not hold any assemblies,³ and whom you excluded from the council in the law issued about the assembling of a council of bishops,⁴ as we have learnt that they are still trying to hold meetings in the town of Sirmium, we request that your Clemency by prohibiting their gathering once and for all, command that respect must first⁵ be shown to the catholic Church, but then also to your laws, so that with God your protector, you may win triumphs, seeing that you look after the peace and tranquillity of the Church.

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 5 (MAUR. 11):
THE BISHOPS OF THE COUNCIL TO THE EMPERORS
GRATIAN, VALENTINIAN II, AND THEODOSIUS I

Introduction

This letter, like *Ep. ex. 4*, was written by the bishops of the council of Aquileia after they had condemned Palladius and Secundianus some time after 3 September 381. But the subject matter is different. It is a request to the three emperors, but primarily to Gratian, to formally disassociate himself from Ursinus, Damasus' unsuccessful rival for the papacy as long ago

1 *inequitavit*: presumably used figuratively, as in 'rides a high horse'.

2 Photinus was bishop of Sirmium, and condemned at several councils as a Sabellian, that is for holding the belief that Father, Son and Holy Spirit differed only in their names, which represented different activities of the same being.

3 *CTh* 16.5.6 (AD 381).

4 It is uncertain what law is meant.

5 In a question of faith the voice of the Catholic Church, formulated by assembled bishops, has precedence over the laws of the emperor, even though in this case Ambrose thinks and hopes that the two authorities concur.

as 366. Ursinus had many supporters who had in the past made difficulties for Damasus at Rome (see *Ep. ex. 7*), and even for Ambrose at Milan (see this letter c. 3). When this letter was being written Ursinus seems to still to have been in exile at Cologne, but he was making energetic efforts to get himself recalled. It would seem that his intrigues were making sufficient progress to cause worry, in the first place no doubt to Pope Damasus, but evidently also to Ambrose and his North Italian allies.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 5*

To the most clement emperors, the most glorious and blessed Christian princes (*principes*) Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius the holy synod that met at Aquileia sends this address.

1. Provision has indeed been made, most clement emperors, through the enactments of your Serenity, that the unbelief of the Arians henceforth will be able neither to escape detection, nor spread. For we believe that the decrees of the synod will not fail to be effective. But as far as the west is concerned, only two men were found to have the face to oppose the synod with their profane and impious words.¹ These are men who earlier had regularly sought to disturb a mere corner of Dacia Ripensis.²

2. There is another matter which worries us more, which, as we had agreed, we had to discuss thoroughly in case it could infect the whole body of the Church all over the world, and throw everything into confusion. For although we agreed by a large majority that Ursinus³ could not succeed in insinuating himself with your Piety, even though he allows (you) no respite, and most troublesome attempts at persuasion are made (by him) even amid the exigencies of war,⁴ nevertheless in case your holy mind, and the serenity of your spirit, which takes delight in furthering the interests of each and all, should be persuaded by the insincere flattery of this troublesome individual, we feel that we must, if you will deign to permit it, dissuade you and plead

1 Palladius and Secundianus, cf. *Ep. ex. 4*. They were the only *Homoian* bishops to attend at Aquileia. This does not of course mean that they were now the only bishops left to accept the creed of Ariminum.

2 A province south of the Danube, now north-west Bulgaria.

3 Unsuccessful rival of Damasus for the papacy in 366. See also *Ep. ex. 7.4–5* below.

4 Some time exiled to Cologne, he continued to petition Gratian to restore him to the papacy. The war is the Gothic war in the Balkans, in which Gratian was intermittently involved, and which continued until 3 October 382.

with you, not only in order to forestall future happenings, but also because we are shocked at those of the past, which that man's shamelessness has already brought about. For if he finds any opening at all for his audacity, is there anything that he will not turn upside down?

3. But if you can be moved by pity for one individual, let the joint supplication of all the bishops move you all the more. For which of us will be associated with him in the fellowship of the communion, seeing that he has tried to seize a dignity to which he was not entitled, and which he could not attain by legal means, and that the dignity to which he perversely aspired, he is now most perversely trying to regain.¹ Although so often condemned for causing public disorder, he persists notwithstanding, as if incapable of being shocked by previous warnings. This man, as many of us have experienced and seen even during this synod,² was allied and closely linked with Arians at that time when together with Valens³ he was striving to disrupt the church of Milan by means of their detestable assembly, plotting secret schemes (*consilia*) now outside the synagogue,⁴ now in the mansions (*domibus*)⁵ of the Arians, getting his followers to join them, and additionally, because he could not himself enter their congregations openly, giving them instruction and information how the peace of the church could be upset. The madness of these schemes gave him fresh courage because he could win their supporters and allies for himself.

4. And therefore since it is written ... *as for a heretic, after one admonition, have nothing more to do with him*,⁶ and since also another man, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has said that beasts of that kind are to be repudiated, and we must not greet or associate with them,⁷ how can we fail to consider one, whom we have seen included in their fellowship, to be an upholder of their lack of faith (*perfidia*)? Even if this were not so it would

1 He was still claiming that he, rather than Damasus, was the rightful pope.

2 The *Acta* of the council have nothing about Ursinus.

3 On Valens, once bishop of Poetovio, see also *Ep. ex.* 4. 9. We have no definite date for their joint agitation at Milan. As it is not mentioned in *Ep. ex.* 7, it was probably later than winter 378/9, but some time before the council of Aquileia. Ursinus was not a *Homoian*. On a possible motive for his cooperating with them see McLynn 1994, 59.

4 Nothing else is known about this episode. Ambrose's references to the Jews often are concerned more with the Jews of Scripture than with the Jews of Milan, but he seems to have seen the Synagogue as a rival of the Church: cf. pp. 105 and 156 above.

5 Evidently of well-to-do Arians.

6 Titus 3.10.

7 Cf. 2 Jn 10.

nevertheless be necessary to implore your Clemency not to permit the Roman Church, the head of the whole Roman world, and with it the sacred faith of the apostles to be disturbed. For it is from there that the laws of the venerable communion flow to all its members. And so we beg and petition you that you deign to deprive that man of the possibility of worming his way into your confidence.¹

5. We know that your Clemency's² scrupulous propriety will not want him to put forward propositions unworthy of your hearing. I hope that he will not give noisy utterance to speech inappropriate to the office and title of a bishop, that he will not address you with shameless speech. While he ought *to have a testimonial even from outsiders*,³ your Clemency should deign to remember with what kind of testimonial his own fellow citizens sent him on his way. For it is a shame to say, and against modesty to repeat, with how disgraceful an accusation they have wounded his reputation. Bound by this shame he should at least have kept silent, and if he had any sense at all of the office of a bishop, he would be putting the peace and harmony of the Church before his own ambition and desire. But being completely destitute of any kind of shame, he sends letters by Paschasius,⁴ an excommunicated character, the standard-bearer of his own frenzy, and sows disorder, and tries to stir up even pagans and reprobates.

6. We therefore ask you that you grant security both to the Roman people, who ever since the report of the urban prefect are in suspense of uncertainty,⁵ and also to us bishops by formally disowning that most troublesome⁶ fellow. May we offer continuous and unbroken thanksgiving to God the omnipotent Father and to the Lord God his Son, if this petition is granted.

1 Translating *obrependi*, the word also used to describe what Ursinus is trying to do in c. 2, line 15, rather than Zelzer's *obripiendi*.

2 Note the singular. Gratian is in fact the addressee.

3 1 Tim. 3.7 on qualifications of bishop. Ursinus wished to be recognised as bishop of Rome.

4 Paschasius seems to be Ursinus' envoy petitioning the urban prefect to let Ursinus return from exile to Rome.

5 Had the urban prefect announced that Ursinus might be allowed to return to Rome?

6 *Importunissimus*, cf. *obreptio importuna* with which the account of the intrigues of Ursinus are introduced in 2.17.

THE COUNCIL OF AQUILEIA AND THE DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULAE EXTRA COLLECTIONEM*, 6 (MAUR. 12), 8 (MAUR. 14) AND 9 (MAUR. 13)

These three letters, written in the name of the Council of Aquileia, although addressed to all three emperors were really intended for Theodosius I and call for action by him, and are concerned with problems that Theodosius must have thought had been settled at the council of Constantinople. *Ep. ex.* 6 (Maur. 12) is the earliest of these letters. As it was written in the name of the Council of Aquileia it was certainly written after 3 September 381.¹ Yet it does not take any notice of the decisions of the Council of Constantinople which ended on 9 July 381.² That Council had decided that Meletius, the deceased bishop of Antioch, should be succeeded by Flavianus, and not by Paulinus who was bishop of a rival Nicene community at Antioch, ignoring the alleged agreement between Paulinus and Meletius that whoever survived the other should be bishop of both communities.³ But *Ep. ex.* 6 assumes that the issue is still open, that the agreement between Meletius and Paulinus⁴ is still valid, and that Paulinus should by right become bishop. The bishops are, however, prepared to leave the decision to a general synod. So they ask the emperor Theodosius to call a council at Alexandria to settle the Antiochene schism. How can we account for this ignoring of what had been decided at Constantinople?

The simplest explanation would be that because of the slowness of communication,⁵ reports of the decisions of the council of Constantinople had not yet reached the bishops at Aquileia when they wrote this particular letter, perhaps still quite early in September. But some time later, we do not know how

1 *Acta* 1.

2 J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 3, col. 557.

3 On this dispute see also introduction and translation of *Ep.* 71 above p. 56.

4 Doubted by McLynn 1994, 141, following Cavallera 1905, 232–43.

5 Jones 1964, 403 n.76: laws issued at Constantinople took 29, 30 and 80 days to reach Rome or Milan.

much later, Ambrose and the other bishops of Italy again wrote to Theodosius on the subject of the Antiochene schism (*Ep. ex.* 9, Maur. 13). Now they more or less knew what had been decided at Constantinople, even if they were misinformed on one point.¹ They did not like what they had heard. They refused to recognise the consecration of Flavianus for Antioch and of Nectarius for Constantinople, and asked Theodosius to convoke a council at Rome to discuss these consecrations once more.

Theodosius duly rejected the request of the Italian bishops. His letter has not been preserved, but that Theodosius turned down the petition with some vigour can be deduced from the letter which Ambrose and the other Italian bishops wrote in reply to the imperial letter (*Ep. ex.* 8, Maur. 14). This in effect amounts to a withdrawal of the request, together with a justification of its having been made. The letter does, however, raise a new issue, which had not been mentioned in the bishops' previous letter, and which had therefore not been rejected by Theodosius: the progress of the heresy of Apollinaris,² which the bishops argue ought to be discussed at a council. But this was an additional excuse for troubling the emperor with the letter, not a serious new political initiative.

With hindsight it seems obvious that Theodosius could never have accepted the request to convoke a synod about the situation at Antioch which would reopen some of the most difficult issues, issues which, as he cannot but have hoped, had been finally decided at the Council of Constantinople. The hopelessness of the request must have been evident to contemporaries, certainly to a man with the political instincts of Ambrose. So why did he and his Italian colleagues make these demands? Perhaps they made them not because they genuinely believed that the decisions of Constantinople could be reversed, but in order to protest against the way the decisions had been reached. For neither the western bishops nor the western emperor can have been happy about the way the affairs of the Church in the east were settled at the Council of Constantinople. It had actually been Gratian who was responsible for the recall from exile of the Nicene bishops in the East.³ That was before Theodosius had become emperor. But at the Council of Constantinople it was Theodosius who settled the eastern Church on a Nicene basis, ignoring Gratian, the western emperor, as well as the

1 See *Ep. ex.* 9.5 with commentary.

2 Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea, still living at the time, taught that Christ possessed a human body, but not a human soul, whose place was taken by the divine Logos.

3 Socrates, *HE* 5.2.1; Sozomen, *HE* 7.1.3; Theodoret, *HE* 5.2.

western bishops (including Pope Damasus, and Ambrose), and last but by no means least ignoring the pope's traditional ally, the bishop of Alexandria. So it is likely that the call for a new council to meet at Rome, and to reconsider the consecrations decided by Theodosius and the Council of Constantinople, was intended as a western protest, that is a protest by the North Italian bishops, led by Ambrose and strongly supported by the emperor Gratian,⁹⁵ against Theodosius' policy of establishing an eastern Church taking its lead exclusively from Constantinople. It was a protest designed also to attract the support of the Church of Alexandria, traditionally an ally of the papacy and a natural opponent of the upstart Church of Constantinople.

In the event the western initiative was rejected, but it was not totally ignored. For in spring or summer 382 a number of eastern bishops assembled for a synod at Constantinople, after they had received a letter of summons from Theodosius. They duly sent a delegation of three bishops to their western colleagues assembled at Rome. These carried a letter to the effect that the eastern bishops would have been glad to celebrate the recently regained unity of the Church at a joint council with their western colleagues, but that the conditions in their sees were still far too unstable for them to go on from Constantinople to Rome. They declared their adherence to the Nicene creed, and their condemnation of Apollinarianism. This was uncontroversial as far as the west was concerned. But they also stated categorically that they had ordained Nectarius bishop of Constantinople and Flavianus bishop of Antioch, precisely the decisions which the westerners were refusing to recognise.⁹⁶

NOTES ON THE ORDER OF THE LETTERS

In the manuscripts of the first group of the *Epistulae extra collectionem*, the letters written by Ambrose and the Italian about the decisions of the Council of Constantinople are not preserved in the order in which they were written. In this translation, however, they are presented in chronological order, with *Ep. ex.* 9 printed before *Ep. ex.* 8.

In most manuscripts of the first group of the *Epistulae extra collectionem* the letters relating to the council of Aquileia in 381 are interrupted by a petition from the Roman synods of 378 to Gratian and Valentinian II, numbered

⁹⁵ *Ep. ex.* 9.8. In fact a synod of Western bishops did assemble at Rome in spring or summer 382. They must have received a letter convening them from Gratian: Theodoret, *HE* 5.9.

⁹⁶ Theodoret, *HE* 5.9.

Ep. ex. 7. In this translation, the letters concerned with the council of Aquileia, *Epp. ex. 6, 8 and 9*, are treated together. For *Ep. ex. 7* see below pp. 244ff.

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM*
6 (MAUR. 12)**

To the most clement emperors, the most glorious and blessed Christian princes (*principes*) Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius the holy synod that met at Aquileia sends this address.¹

1. No matter how abundant is the flood of acts of thanksgiving, we are quite unable to equal the benefits conferred by your Piety, most clement, blessed and glorious princes, Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius, beloved by God and by his Son our Lord Jesus Christ. For now, when after a long time, and after various persecutions which the Arians had inflicted on the Catholics, and especially that Lucius,² whose career was marked by the impious slaughter of monks and virgins, and also Demofilus³ the grim perpetrator of irreligion, all the churches of God, especially in the east, have been restored to the Catholics,⁴ while in the west there were found scarcely two heretics able to oppose the holy council, can there be anybody who thinks himself competent to acknowledge your favours adequately?

2. But if we cannot do justice to your benefactions with words, we wish to make repayment with the prayers of the council. Although in each of our churches every one of us every day celebrates vigils before our God, on behalf of your empire, yet when we have all been brought together we give thanks to our omnipotent God for your imperial rule and your peace and your safety, and think nothing more fitting than this duty, because it is through you that peace and harmony have returned to us.

1 Obviously later than 3 September 381, though we do not know how much later. As far as the subject matter goes it is directed at Theodosius, just as *Ep. ex. 5* was directed at Gratian. The letter is in fact extremely polite to Theodosius. But its substance, inasmuch as it is an expression of discontent at the exclusion of the West from the council of Constantinople, will have appealed to Gratian rather than to his eastern colleague.

2 Arian bishop of Alexandria after deposition of Peter the successor of Athanasius, cf. Theoderet, *HE* 4.21.12; Sozomen, *HE* 6.20; Socrates, *HE* 4.24.

3 Arian bishop of Constantinople AD 370–80, cf. Socrates, *HE* 4.14; 5.7; Sozomen, *HE* 6.13.

4 See Socrates, *HE* 5.10; Sozomen, *HE* 7.9.

3. It is the case that in the west, in two corners only, that is on the borders of Dacia Ripensis and of Moesia, voices appear to have been raised against the faith.¹ Concerning these we believe that now that the council has decided your Clemency must graciously take measures. But over all territories and regions, from the mountain barriers of Thrace to the Ocean, the communion of the faithful remains one and unassailed. As for the east, we have learnt with the utmost joy and happiness that the Arians who violently invaded the churches have been ejected, and the sacred temples of God are attended by Catholics alone.

4. However, as the jealousy of the devil is in the habit of never taking a rest, we hear that among the Catholics themselves there are numerous dissensions and unsettled discord. And we view with heartfelt concern that many things have been changed, and that men have been harassed who should have received help, men who have always stuck fast to our communion. In short, Timotheus,² bishop of the Alexandrian Church and also Paulinus³ of the Church of Antioch, who always kept inviolate harmony of communion with us, are being constantly troubled by the disagreements of others whose faith in days gone by was uncertain.⁴ We would indeed, if it can be done and if abundance of faith recommends them, have these people joined to our fellowship, but on condition that the rank of the comrades of our ancient communion remains intact. And it is not without reason that we are concerned for the latter: first of all because the fellowship of communion ought to be without bitterness, then because we have for a long time received letters from each group, and especially from those who were dissenting within the Church of Antioch.⁵

5. If the invasion of the enemy had not obstructed the plan,⁶ we would have arranged to send out some of our own number to be there, as men of confidence and arbitrators for the restoration of peace if that was possible.

1 By Palladius and Secundianus. The letter says nothing about *Homoian* bishops that did not attend at Aquileia. There certainly were such, but we do not know how many.

2 Timotheus was the Nicene bishop of Alexandria (381–85), and like Damasus, Ambrose and the West generally, he continued to recognise Paulinus as bishop of Antioch.

3 Paulinus was first leader then bishop of one Nicene group at Antioch. Meletius, and after 381 Flavianus, were in turn bishops of the other and larger one.

4 Meletius had been consecrated by Arian bishops, though he soon showed himself a Nicene (Sozomen, *HE* 4.2.8).

5 Paulinus was in communion with both Rome and Alexandria, neither of whom recognised either Meletius or Flavianus.

6 The Goths in the Balkans hindered communication with the east by land.

But as our purposes could not at that time be put into effect because of public disorder we think that a petition of ours was offered to your Clemency¹ in which, in accordance with the agreement of the two parties,² we proposed, that if one of them were to die, the Churches were to be left in the charge of the survivor, and that no attempt should be made to ordain anyone over his head. We therefore ask you most clement and Christian princes that you decide that a council of all Catholic bishops be held at Alexandria, to enter into full discussion among themselves, and to define to whom communion is to be offered, and with whom it is to be maintained.

6. For although we have always supported the arrangements and order of the Church of Alexandria and in accordance with ancestral tradition have preserved communion with it in indissoluble fellowship, nevertheless in case some appear to be unfairly treated (seeing that they have asked for communion with us in accordance with an agreement which we wish to remain valid) or lest it might seem that the shortest route to that peace and fellowship of the faithful had been neglected, we beseech you that when the bishops have discussed the matter among themselves in full assembly they should seek the support of your Piety for their episcopal decrees, and that you should decide to bring (their decisions) to our notice, so that we are not left hanging in nervous uncertainty, but filled with happiness and freed from worry we may give thanks to your Piety before almighty God, not only because irreligion has been shut out, but because faith and concord have been restored to the Catholics. This is something which is also sought from you through envoys by the African and the Gallic Churches,³ namely that you make all the bishops in the whole world your debtors; though admittedly the debt owed to your virtue is not small even now.

7. To petition your Clemency and in order to obtain what we seek, we have sent as envoys our brethren and fellow-priests, whom we beg you to deign to hear with clemency, and permit to return in good time.

1 This, and also the perfect, *poposcimus*/'we proposed', later in the sentence, imply that Ambrose thinks (but is not sure) that the council has previously petitioned Theodosius about the schism at Antioch. If that interpretation is correct, and there had been an earlier letter, we know nothing about it.

2 Theodoret, *HE* 5.3.

3 This is a veritable Western alliance.

Note

In most manuscripts of the first group of the *Epistulae extra collectionem*, the letters relating to the council of Aquileia in 381 are interrupted by a petition from the Roman synod of 378 to Gratian and Valentinian II, numbered *Ep. ex. 7*. In this translation, *Ep. ex. 6, 8, and 9* are treated together because of their thematic unity; for a full treatment of *Ep. ex. 7*, see below pp. 244ff.

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 9 (MAUR. 13)**Introduction**

It is generally agreed that this letter is earlier than *Ep. ex. 8* (Maur. 13).¹ Before dispersing, the council of Aquileia had written to Theodosius asking him convoke a synod at Alexandria to settle the Antiochene schism, *Ep. ex. 6* (Maur. 12), even though the council of Constantinople had already consecrated Flavianus as bishop of Antioch in succession to Meletius, and Nectarius as bishop of Constantinople.² Not surprisingly this met with no response. Now Ambrose and certain bishops of Italy, formally or informally assembled, or perhaps even Ambrose writing for the bishops of Italy on his own initiative, ask Theodosius to convoke a general council at Rome to examine the Antiochene schism once more, and also to consider whether Maximus or Nectarius is the rightful bishop of Constantinople.

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM*
9 (MAUR. 13)**

Ambrose and the other bishops of Italy to the most blessed emperor and most clement *princeps* Theodosius.

1. We knew that your holy mind was dedicated to Almighty God with pure and sincere faith, but you have crowned your former benefactions by the recent ones, in that you have restored the Catholics to the churches,³ august emperor. But would that you had also restored the Catholics themselves to

¹ See above p. 232.

² See above p. 231.

³ In the East, governed by him, Theodosius had restored the churches to the Catholics, cf. Socrates, *HE* 5.7; Sozomen, *HE* 7.5.

their ancient reverence, so that they stop making innovations that contravene the regulations of our ancestors, and do not arbitrarily abolish what ought to be kept, and keep what ought to be abolished! That is why we regret, perhaps more in sorrow than in anger, that it was easier for the heretics to be expelled than for the Catholics to agree. It is impossible to explain the extent of the confusion that has been produced.

2. We had written recently that since the city of Antioch had two bishops, Paulinus and Meletius, who we thought were in harmony in the faith, either they should reach an agreement between themselves as to peace and concord, an agreement which would pay due regard to ecclesiastical order,¹ or at any rate if one of them were to die with the other surviving him, there should be no appointment to the place of the deceased as long as the other survived. But now that Meletius has died, and Paulinus survives, whom a fellowship established by our ancestors, and never interrupted, witnesses to have always been in communion with us, it is reported that a third party has unjustly and against all ecclesiastical protocol, been appointed not so much a successor as a superior to the position of Meletius.²

3. And this is alleged to have been done with the consent and on the advice of Nectarius,³ the regularity of whose ordination we would question. For in the recent council, after Maximus,⁴ the bishop, had read a letter of Peter of holy memory⁵ proving by clearest evidence that the Church of Alexandria was still in communion with him, and that it was on Peter's instructions that he had been consecrated bishop in a private house by three officiating bishops, because the Arians still controlled the basilicas of the Church, we had no ground, most blessed emperor, to doubt that his episcopate was valid, especially when he testified that he had resisted and that compulsion had been applied to him by a great part of the people and clergy.

1 *Salvo ordine ecclesiastico*: the reference is to *Ep. ex.* 6.4 where Ambrose and the bishops of the council of Aquileia express support for Paulinus, whom Rome and the West had recognised, and who they clearly think ought to be the bishop of Antioch.

2 Since the West considered Meletius' case to be in fact inferior to that of Paulinus, Flavianus, by being superimposed over Paulinus, received a position superior to that of his predecessor.

3 Nectarius was a former urban prefect of Constantinople whom Theodosius got ordained as bishop of Constantinople in 381.

4 Cynic philosopher who had been consecrated Catholic bishop of Constantinople by three Egyptian bishops sent by Peter of Alexandria. Theodosius and the council of Constantinople did not recognise him and he was exiled. He appealed to the council of Aquileia.

5 Bishop of Alexandria in succession to Athanasius. He was already dead in spring 381, being succeeded by his brother Timothy who attended the council of Constantinople.

4. Nevertheless in case we give the impression of having issued a judgement hastily in the absence of the parties, we thought it right to inform your Clemency by letter, so that his interest might be served in a way most conducive to peace and concord; because we did in truth observe that it was by no means in accordance with the traditions of the fathers of the Church of Constantinople that Gregory¹ was claiming the episcopate for himself. So we assembled in a council which should have been enjoined on bishops of the whole world,² and came to the opinion that we must make no rash decision. But around that very time at Constantinople, what is it that the bishops who had refused to attend a general council are said to have done? When they learned that Maximus, acting in accordance with our law and the traditions of our ancestors had come to this part of the world to plead his case at this synod, something two bishops of the Church of Alexandria, Athanasius of holy memory and more recently Peter, as well as several other eastern bishops have also done, when even though no council had been formally proclaimed, they resorted to the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome, of Italy and of the whole west. I repeat, when the bishops at Constantinople learnt that Maximus wished to go to law against those who had denied his episcopate, they surely ought to have awaited our verdict on his case.³ We do not claim a right to carry out the investigation, but there ought nevertheless have been a partnership with a view to reaching a joint decision.

5. To conclude, it should have been determined whether Maximus ought to be deprived of his episcopate, before it was decided to confer it on somebody else, especially as Maximus was complaining that the men concerned had wrongfully deprived and vilified him. Considering therefore that our fellowships⁴ received Maximus as bishop into our communion

1 Gregory Nazianzen was called to lead the orthodox in Constantinople which had an Arian bishop at that time. He was formally elected bishop at the council of Constantinople in 381, but resigned not long after, to be succeeded by Nectarius.

2 In fact attendance was not prescribed. Gratian had originally planned a general council (*Acta* 8, cf. 11), which would settle the orthodoxy for the Church as a whole, as the council of Constantinople was to do for the Church in the East. But Theodosius forestalled Gratian by calling the council of Constantinople, and so Gratian had to modify his plan. See McLynn 1994, 124–25. The letter that actually summoned the council makes it clear that attendance would not be compulsory (*Acta* 4).

3 The council of Constantinople met in May and ended on 9 July 381 (Mansi, vol. III, 557); the council of Aquileia opened on 3 September 381 (*Acta* 1).

4 *Nostra consortia*, i.e. the churches respectively of East and West.

because he had undoubtedly been ordained by Catholic bishops, we thought that he should not have been disqualified from seeking the Constantinopolitan episcopate, and we concluded that his allegations should be assessed in the presence of all parties. However, since our Modesty¹ has recently learnt that Nectarius has been ordained at Constantinople, it does not seem to us that our communion with the east is intact, even less so since it is said that Nectarius was immediately deprived (of his episcopate) without the participation of the communion, by the same individuals by whom he had been ordained.² This is therefore no mean difficulty.

6. And it is not some dispute over some objective or ambition of our own that worries me, but we are upset by the dissolution and falling apart of our communion. And we do not see how it can be restored unless either that bishop is given back to Constantinople who was ordained earlier, or at least a council is held jointly by us and the eastern bishops in the city of Rome on the problem of the two ordinations.

7. Nor does it seem undignified, august emperor, that men who thought it so important to wait for the judgement of the one bishop, Acholius,³ that they decided to summon him from the west to Constantinople, must enter into a discussion with the prelate of the Roman Church and neighbouring and Italian bishops.

8. As to us, having been encouraged also by the most blessed *princeps*, the brother of your Piety, to write to the power⁴ of your Clemency, we request that it be your wish that where there is a single communion, judgement should be joint, and consensus concordant.

1 *Mediocritas nostra*.

2 I have bracketed words which have nothing corresponding in the Latin but which I thought were needed to bring out the meaning. Ambrose's basic argument is that the deposition of an important bishop requires participation of all the bishops in the Communion. A purely eastern decision is not valid. That Nectarius was deposed almost as soon as he had been ordained is of course untrue. Ambrose seems to have believed a false rumour.

3 Bishop of Thessalonica, who baptised Theodosius in 380, and was asked by pope Damasus to use his influence against the ordination of Maximus (Damasus, *Ep.* 5: *PL* 13.365A–369A). Ambrose *Ep.* 51 (Maur. 15) in AD 383 praises the deceased Acholius.

4 *Imperio*.

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 8 (MAUR. 14)**Introduction**

This letter, like *Epp. ex.* 6 and 9, was written by Ambrose and some other Italian bishops to Theodosius at Constantinople after the dispersal of the Council of Aquileia of September 381. This is the third and last letter of the series. In *Ep. ex.* 9 the Italian bishops had demanded that a council should meet at Rome to reopen the question of the appointments to the sees of Antioch and Constantinople. Theodosius had rejected the demand in a letter which was evidently very firm, but which has been lost. With *Ep. ex.* 8 Ambrose and the Italian bishops in effect accept the emperor's decision.

A synod did meet at Rome in the following year, but without the eastern bishops.¹ Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History* cites a letter of a synod of bishops meeting at Constantinople addressed to the bishops meeting at Rome, in which they explain why they could not make the journey to Rome, and also stating very firmly that the appointments made in the previous year at Constantinople must stand. This section of the letter reads like an ecclesiastical parallel to the lost letter of Theodosius.² It is dated by Theodoret to summer 382.³ The Roman council was perhaps a little bit earlier. *Ep. ex.* 8 contains no suggestion that a council had yet been assembled at Rome, and that the letter was written in its name. So it was probably written earlier still, say in winter 381/2 or spring 382.

**TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM*
8 (MAUR. 14)**

Ambrose and the other bishops of Italy to the most blessed emperor and most clement *princeps* Theodosius.⁴

1. Knowledge of your faith, which is spread through the entire world, has filled our mind with a deep feeling of affection; and therefore, so that your reign might gain the additional glory of your being seen to have restored unity to the churches both of the west and of the east, we have thought it

1 Pietri 1976, 866–72.

2 Theodoret, *HE* 5.9.

3 Theodoret, *HE* 5.8.

4 See McLynn 1994, 139–44.

right, most serene and faithful emperor, by means of our letter to petition your Clemency, and at the same time to inform you of the state of the Church. It was a cause of sorrow that the fellowship of holy communion between east and west was interrupted.¹

2. We will not say by whose mistake or by whose fault, in case we give the impression of spreading rumours and empty gossip. And we do not regret having attempted, what not to have attempted would have been culpable. This criticism has indeed frequently been made of us that we seem to neglect fellowship with those of the east, and reject their goodwill.

3. Indeed we decided to put ourselves to this trouble not for the sake of Italy, which has for a long time been at peace and untroubled by Arians, and is not disturbed by any discord caused by heretics; it is not, I repeat, for our own sake that we take this trouble. We are pursuing not our own interest, but the interest of all; we are not doing this for Gaul and Africa which enjoy the harmonious fellowship of all bishops, but so that the matters which have troubled our communion with the east should be examined at a council and all difficulty between us abolished.

4. There are a number of concerns involving, not only the individuals about whom your Clemency deigned to write,² but also those who are trying to introduce into the Church a dogma said to be of Apollinaris;³ these have worried us, and ought to have been pruned in the presence of the parties concerned; so that if a man has been found guilty of introducing a new dogma, and convicted of error, he should not be able to hide behind the name of our common faith, but seeing that he is not bound by the authority of our teaching, he must immediately give up both the duties and the title of bishop. In this way there will remain no cloak for trickery, no scope for fraudulent devices to be used by those wishing to deceive.⁴ For an individual who has not been convicted with the parties present, as your Clemency has laid down in an august and princely reply, will always snatch at a pretext to reopen the case.

¹ See *Ep. ex. 9. 5*.

² In his lost reply to *Ep. ex. 9* Theodosius had evidently demolished the reasons for a synod which Ambrose had given. Ambrose gives up for time being at least the cases of Paulinus and Nectarius, but brings up the new issue of Apollinarianism.

³ Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea (c.361–90), accepted the *homoousion* ('hiding behind the common faith'), but taught that Christ had taken a human body, though not a human soul. Apollinaris had been condemned in the Council of Constantinople of 381.

⁴ See McLynn 1994, 144, on Timothy of Beirut, who signed the canons of Constantinople condemning Apollinarianism, and remained a bishop, yet accepted the Christology of Apollinaris.

5. We therefore ask for a council of bishops, so that nobody should be permitted to make up lies against anyone in his absence, and so that the truth should be hammered out at a council. In this way no suspicion of either prejudice or partisanship will fall on those who look at all the facts in the presence of the parties.¹

6. We have certainly not compiled those suggestions to settle the issue, but in order to provide information, and we, who have asked for a judgement, are not anticipating the verdict. And when bishops were summoned to the council, we do not think that any criticism ought to be attached to them, because in many cases their absence was more effective than their presence would have been,² since it served the common good.³ For neither did we think it matter for criticism that a single priest of the Church of Constantinople, Paul by name, demanded a council of easterners and westerners in Achaia.⁴

7. Your Clemency is aware that that demand was not unreasonable, a demand which was also made by easterners,⁵ but because the uncertainties of Illyricum troubled us, therefore locations that were reachable by sea, and safer, were sought.⁶ And we plainly did not make any innovations in the expressions of our faith, but preserving the definitions made in councils by Athanasius of sacred memory, who was, as it were, a column of our faith, and by our fathers of ancient sanctity, we do not tear up the boundary stones which our fathers have set up, nor do we violate the laws of the communion which we have inherited, but reserving the respect which we owe to your empire, we show ourselves desirous of peace and quietness.

1 *Intentionis vel facilitatis suspicio*.

2 Wood and Walford 1881 translate: 'who were more present by their very absence'. Is the argument that the absentees were effectively present and serving the common good, i.e. the Nicene cause, by opposing Arians at home?

3 This sentence evidently refutes a reason Theodosius had given for refusing the request of the Western bishops, namely that there were too few of them.

4 Nothing else is known about this Paul.

5 That there was some support also in the East for the idea that another council was needed is witnessed not only by the obscure deacon Paul, mentioned in this letter, but also by the fact that, in the following year, Eastern bishops came to Constantinople in the expectation of such a meeting (Theodoret, *HE* 5.9).

6 *Maritima et tutiora quaesita sunt*: Rome is not maritime, but it is accessible by sea, and at the time it was unquestionably safer than Achaia because of the Gothic war in the Balkans. The proposal was for the council to be held at Rome (summer 382). Evidently Theodosius had complained that this was impossibly inconvenient for Eastern bishops who expected to meet, if at all, at Constantinople, or at least in Illyricum. Ambrose seems to argue that he has chosen Rome because it could be reached by sea, and did not require travelling through the troubled Balkans.

PETITION OF A ROMAN COUNCIL TO THE EMPERORS GRATIAN AND VALENTINIAN II

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 7 (378)

Introduction

Ambrose's *Epistula extra collectionem 7* was addressed by a synod assembled by Pope Damasus at Rome late in 378 to the emperor Gratian, and his seven-year-old colleague Valentinian II. The letter was composed after the emperor Valens had fallen at the battle of Adrianople on 8 August 378, and before Theodosius had been made emperor of the east, which was on 19 January 379. It was therefore written when Gratian was ruler of the entire empire. The letter is interesting especially because the imperial response to it has also survived. This is Letter 13 of the *Collectio Avellana*,¹ which Gratian sent to Aquilinus, vicar of Rome, ordering him in effect to comply with most of the bishops' requests, and seeming to lay down rules for jurisdiction over bishops for the future.²

The purpose of the petition is clearly twofold. The bishops ask the emperor to assist Pope Damasus in specific difficulties that have been troubling him for some considerable time. But the proposed remedy is to set up a disciplinary system for bishops in Italy and the west, which would give formal judicial powers to metropolitan bishops, and the ultimate jurisdiction to the bishop of Rome. The system is justified on the principle that accusations of immoral conduct against a bishop or a member of the clergy must be tried by their clerical peers, and not by a secular judge, a principle which the synod claims had been accepted by the emperor's father Valentinian I.³

1 CSEL 35.54–58.

2 K. M. Girardet, 'Gericht über den Bischof von Rome', *Historische Zeitschrift* 259 (1994), 1–38.

3 In *Ep.* 75.2 Ambrose seems to be quoting from the same now lost rescript of Valentinian I: 'In a case involving the faith or any ecclesiastical order the judge should be one who is not

PETITION OF COUNCIL TO GRATIAN AND VALENTINIAN II 245

Gratian accepts the proposed scheme of jurisdiction. Indeed he extends it. While the synod's letter seems to limit itself to the praetorian prefecture of Italy, which at the time included western Illyricum and Africa,¹ the emperor's reply extended it to the prefecture of Gaul,² that is Gaul, Spain and Britain. Indeed it is just possible that the emperor visualised that even metropolitans in the east might come under Roman jurisdiction.³ The only major request that is not granted is the proposal that the bishop of Rome should be exempted from the jurisdiction of the local imperial officials.⁴ Using words that show that he has read the relevant section in the letter,⁵ the emperor insists that the privilege is unnecessary, as even under existing arrangements no man of notorious immorality or who had been convicted of malicious prosecution would be accepted whether as an accuser or as a witness against a bishop.⁶

Gratian's acceptance of the jurisdictional proposals of the synod shows that the interests of the emperor and the bishop of Rome coincided to an important extent. It was obviously in the interest of the bishop to extend his jurisdiction. It is less obvious that it was in the interest of the emperor too. But Gratian evidently thought that it was. Clearly Gratian was not happy with the absence of a hierarchy in the organisation of much of the Church in the west, and was concerned that it should have a structure of the kind the

unequal in rank and of similar legal status'. Constantius II had already in 355 conferred on bishops the privilege of being liable to face accusation only before a synod (*CTh* 16.2.12). That clergy should not be subject to secular judges was already a demand of the council of Sardica (see fragments of Hilary of Poitiers' *Against Valens and Ursacius*, 1.10 (p.181), translated in L. R. Wickham, *Hilary of Poitiers, Conflict of Conscience and Law in the Fourth-century Church*, Liverpool 1997, 65).

1 The reference to 'proconsuls' in the emperors' reply shows that proconsular Africa is included.

2 *Coll. Avell.* 13.11 (22).

3 *Coll. Avell.* 12, in *longinquiribus partibus*: this ambiguous phrase could mean either that the rule was to apply even in territories more distant than the two named prefectures, or – perhaps more likely – that it is to be applied even in out of the way regions within the prefectures. The phrase was already in the synod's letter.

4 Girardet 1994, 22 argues that the omission may be due to the fact that the version of the letter we have is that addressed to the vicar, and not to the *praefectus urbi*, whom jurisdiction over the bishop of Rome might concern more.

5 Ambrose *Ep. ex.* 7, 11 and *Coll. Avell.* 13.14.

6 *Coll. Avell.* 13.14.

Church in the east had had since Constantine,¹ with the bishop of Rome in the role of a super-metropolitan, or patriarch.²

The letter of the synod of 378 has been transmitted among letters of Ambrose, but Ambrose is not named as writer of the letter. Was it perhaps not composed by Ambrose at all? But if we reject Ambrosian authorship, we have to explain how it came to be preserved among Ambrose's letters, and what is more to be preserved in that group of politically significant letters which Ambrose omitted from the *Collection* which he published himself, but which were nevertheless available to Paulinus when he came to write Ambrose's biography. Timothy Barnes has recently argued³ that Ambrose was present at the Roman council of 378, and that he was the man the council delegated to take the letter to Gratian at Sirmium. He also argues, against McLynn, that it was when this diplomatic mission had brought the bishop of Milan to Sirmium, five hundred miles from his own city, that the emperor Gratian gave him the commission to compose the treatise *De fide*. So it was because Ambrose had come to Sirmium with the letter of the Roman synod that he happened to be at Sirmium when Germinius its *Homoian* bishop died, and thus in a position to consecrate the Nicene Anemius in his place.⁴

Why should Gratian have asked Ambrose for an exposition of the faith at this time? If Ambrose did come to Sirmium, as a spokesman and delegate of the strongly Nicene synod of Damasus, as Barnes has argued, it would have been quite natural for Gratian to ask for a full presentation of the Nicene position, which was the Roman position, and, at least in the view of Damasus and his synod, the Italian position. In the *De fide* Ambrose certainly claims to be speaking for Italy, as he makes abundantly clear in the peroration in praise of Italy at the end of Book 2: 'This is no land of unbelievers, but the land whose custom it is to send forth confessors – Italy; Italy often tempted, but never drawn away; Italy which your Majesty has long defended.'⁵

If Barnes' theory is accepted the mission of 378 was certainly a turning point in Ambrose's life. He had been bishop of Milan for four years. But he had been consecrated without any theological qualifications. He had been

1 Sixth canon of Nicaea; second canon of Constantinople.

2 The pope had in fact acted as patriarch/metropolitan in southern Italy (*Italia Suburbicaria*), but not in the north (*Italia Annonaria*), where even the organisation into church provinces seems to have been informal and changeable.

3 Barnes 1999, 164–75. Cf. McLynn 1994, 100 and n.17 below.

4 See above p. 11.

5 *De fide* 2.142, trans. H.de Romestin, in *Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.10.

PETITION OF COUNCIL TO GRATIAN AND VALENTINIAN II 247

learning on the job. He had kept out of theological controversy.¹ Apart from the sensational circumstances of his consecration, he must have still been relatively obscure. He certainly cannot yet have had the influence which some historians have attributed to him even at this stage. But the mission gave him the opportunity to establish the personal relationship with Gratian, which can I think be deduced not only from the intimate terms of the letter Gratian sent to him, but also from the fact that the emperor wrote it with his own hand,² sometime in autumn or winter 379–80.³

Ambrose's first major theological work, the *De fide*, was also a direct outcome of the mission. So was Ambrose's emergence as the most active proponent of Nicene Christianity in Italy. In other words it was the beginning of the activities that gave Ambrose his place in history. Whether he wrote *Ep. ex. 7* himself or not, the fact that the letter had played so important a part in his life could be the reason why he preserved a copy among letters which would be helpful to his biographer.

It remains to examine the wider historical importance of the letter and of the emperor's response to it, and particularly the significance of these documents in the history of the papacy. Gratian's letter to Aquilinus in the *Collectio Avellana* did not become a general law. The second Sirmondian Constitution of 405 deals with the enforcing of the deposition of bishops by bishops, which is a central concern of *Ep. ex. 7* and *Coll. Avell. 13*. It even repeats the ruling of Gratian that deposed bishops should be compelled to live no less than one hundred miles from their former see, which surely is an allusion to *Coll. Avell. 13.10*, but it nevertheless has no reference at all to any jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome over other bishops of Italy, or outside Italy. A shortened form of the Sirmondian edict was included in the Theodosian Code,⁴ but Gratian's letter to Aquilinus was not included.

The system of ecclesiastical jurisdiction laid down in the letter did not become regular practice. The relationship between the bishops of northern Italy remained informal. In the last quarter of the fourth century it was

1 *De virginibus* 1.1.3: *De virgin.* was his first work, composed after he had already been a bishop three years.

2 The letter: *CSEL* 79.3–4 and 82.10.iii, cxvi–cxvii; the emperor's handwriting: *Ep. ex. 12.3*

3 McLynn 1994, 115, dates it in the later part of the emperor's stay in Illyricum in 380. This later date is a consequence of McLynn dating the first meeting of Ambrose and Gratian in summer 379, and locating it at Milan (McLynn 1994, 100), while I, with T. Barnes, date the first meeting in 378/9, and locate it at Sirmium.

4 *CTh.* 16.2.25

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, not the pope at Rome who approximated to the position of patriarch of northern Italy. So the letter to Aquilinus was, as it were, an omen of a papal supremacy, which still lay in the future, but which it did not directly help to bring about. The letter of the synod is, however, significant as evidence of Damasus' concept of the role of the papacy, a concept which he also publicised by referring to the see of Rome as *sedes apostolica*, which he was the first to do. Damasus' view of the universal jurisdiction of the papacy did not die with him. The decretals which his successor Siricius (383–399) sent to various bishops in the west assume the pope's jurisdictional authority. The practice was continued by Siricius' successors, especially, Innocent I (401–17) and Leo I (440–51). So the expansion of papal jurisdiction was an internal development within the Church. For many years there was no underpinning by the state. It was in Valentinian III's seventeenth *Novella* (AD 445) that the doctrine of papal supremacy was asserted in a secular enactment. The actual development of papal supremacy had preceded its recognition by the empire.¹

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 7

Petition (of a Roman council to the emperors Gratian and Valentinian).²

1. This too, most clement emperors, is conspicuous evidence of your glory and your piety, that we who have been assembled in numbers almost past counting from the scattered parts of Italy in the sanctuary of the high apostolic

¹ See J. Gaudemet, *L'église dans l'empire romain (ive-ve siècles)*, Paris 1958, 416–21, 423–26. Valentinian, *Nov.* 17 (praef.), 'Since the primacy of the apostolic see has been confirmed by the merit of St Peter, by the dignity of the city of Rome, and also by the authority of the sacred synod, no illicit presumption may attempt anything contrary to the authority of the see. For the peace of the Church will finally be preserved everywhere only if the Church universally acknowledges its ruler.' Valentinian, *Nov.* 17 c. 3: 'We deem that both the bishops of Gaul, and those of other provinces shall not attempt anything contrary to ancient custom, without the authorisation of the venerable Pope of the eternal city. But if the Apostolic see has sanctioned or should sanction anything, such regulation shall be as law for them and all men. Thus if any bishop should be summoned to the court of the bishop of Rome, and should refuse to come, he shall be compelled by the governor of the same province to be present' (trans. Pharr). The issue was the consecration of bishops by Hilary of Arles as if he had metropolitan powers. Pope Leo has tried and condemned Hilary's action, and the emperor confirms the pope's decision.

² In the mss. the letter has been transmitted between *Ep. ex.* 6 and 8. It seems to have been transmitted without a definite address. Two mss. give the address as 'the same to the same [plural]'. This suggests that the editor of the first group of letters outside the Collection had

PETITION OF COUNCIL TO GRATIAN AND VALENTINIAN II 249

seat, when we were asking ourselves what we should request from you for the well-being of the churches, were unable to find anything better than what you have already offered us by your own unaided foresight. We see that on the one hand we need not be ashamed to ask, and on the other that your benefactions no longer need to be obtained by asking, and that a succession of imperial decrees is canvassing on our behalf. As for the reasonableness of our petition, we have long been entitled to obtain what we are asking for. As for our need to make this petition, the fact is that we so completely lack the implementation of what has been granted to us, that we desire it to be granted us a second time. Your administration of justice, most clement emperors, allows the evidence that exposes the insanity of some extremely wicked men to accumulate, in order that your benefits might be conferred on the Church more frequently.

2. For already from the outset of your reign you were inspired by the divine spirit to make sure that in the religion of the Lord you upheld the teachings of the holy apostles, who are your supporters in your high office (*honor*), and you decided to restore openness to the body of the Church which the mad rage of Ursinus,¹ who tried to seize an honour to which he has no claim, had cut into factions. So your decision was that following the condemnation of the instigator,² and after the others whom Ursinus had associated with himself for the purpose of stirring up mobs had been forced, as was right, to give up their alliance with that wicked man, the bishop of Rome was to hold an inquiry into the rest of the bishops of the Churches, with the consequence that in a case concerned with religion the high-priest³ of religion would be the judge together with his colleagues,⁴ and that there would be not be any suspicion of an insult to the episcopacy if a bishop was never lightly subjected to the absolute judgement of a secular judge, as could frequently happen in the past.

3. That is evidently a splendid ruling, and one worthy of the most pious emperors, a ruling which confers a very great benefit on the ministry of God,

already found it in another collection. The fact that the addressees were not named may be responsible for the editor's mistake in placing it in the context of letters dealing with the council of Aquileia.

1 Rival of Damasus for the papacy in 366, a conflict which produced rioting and considerable bloodshed. According to Amm. Marc. 27.3.13, 137 were killed on one day.

2 I.e. Ursinus himself.

3 *Pontifex* instead of the usual *sacerdos*, implying a priest set above others, in this case the bishop of Rome.

4 Cf. pp. 135–36 above.

and yet does not spare wrong-doing. For what could be more worthy than that the person who judges the wrong-doing of a priest is precisely one who knows that he cannot show conscious favouritism without danger to himself, and who himself becomes implicated in the offence if he acquits the undeserving or condemns the innocent; and in short is a man, who when he is prosecuting an offence against religion does not concentrate his attention on the bodies¹ of innocent persons, but on the actions of the accused? For it has been shown again and again how many individuals whom secular courts have acquitted have been condemned by bishops, and how many individuals have been absolved by bishops whom the courts had condemned; so that those defendants are actually in a better state,² who anticipating judgement not of the courts but from God, abandoned their right to demand torture, so as to avoid its being inflicted on the innocent, than those who have vindicated themselves by having guiltless persons tortured. We would say more, most benign emperors, if it was not (self-evidently) an abuse that imperial decrees should be proclaimed rather than enforced.

4. But since Ursinus, although he was banished long ago by a judgement of your Clemency,³ is now making use of men whom he has illicitly and sacrilegiously consecrated to try, though furtively, to stir up all the most worthless individuals;⁴ and since not a few bishops, who are illegally holding on to their churches, motivated both by their innate audacity, and the promptings of unholy arrogance, are encouraged by his example to reject the judgement of the Roman bishop, so that even men who realise that they deserve to be condemned, or have actually experienced condemnation, have rented a crowd, and by terrorising their judges with fear of death, and either ignoring witnesses,⁵ or driving them away, are holding on to their illicit episcopate. That is why we are demanding not new imperial legislation, but its enforcement.

1 Literally 'in the sides (*in lateribus*) of the innocent', an allusion to the use of torture, which was regularly ordered by the judge in secular courts to compel a confession by the accused, who in turn might offer slaves for torture in order to establish his innocence.

2 *Melior causa*: the defendants who have chosen trial by a bishop are in a better state (1) because they will get a more just trial; (2) because they have not caused innocent witnesses to be tortured.

3 He was exiled to Gaul by a rescript of Gratian and Valentinian II.

4 Although in exile, and not recognised as a bishop, Ursinus was ordaining priests and sending them to Rome to agitate on his behalf, which they were evidently doing with some success, even twelve years after the disputed election. Clearly there were many who thought that Ursinus, not Damasus, was the rightful bishop of Rome.

5 *Cognitores*.

PETITION OF COUNCIL TO GRATIAN AND VALENTINIAN II 251

5. It certainly is disgraceful that whenever an individual is summoned to a hearing,¹ he resorts to violence, and that he should make his case stronger the more outrageously he behaves. So the bishop of Parma, who has been deposed by our judgement, shamelessly holds on to his church.² Florentius, bishop of Puteoli,³ on being condemned in the same way, and being expelled from his see, troubled the ears of your Serenity, and duly obtained the rescript⁴ he deserved, to the effect that if he had been deposed in the city of Rome by the judgement of bishops, he was disqualified from saying as much as a word at judicial hearings. Yet six years later he has crept back into his city, has occupied the church, and by his arrogance provoked numerous riots in Puteoli, the town from which he had been exiled.

6. Furthermore, your Clemency gave the order in Africa that Restitutus was to face trial before the bishops.⁵ He ought to have acquiesced, but with the aid of a savage band of arrogant individuals he avoided the necessity of making his defence.

7. It was in Africa too, that you gave orders at the bidding of God that Anabaptists were to be exiled.⁶ But the exiles consecrated Claudianus,⁷ and are dispatching him to Rome as if he was a bishop, to cause trouble in that city by proclaiming, contrary to the teaching of the divine scriptures and contrary to the laws of the gospel, that all bishops, past or present, had lacked divine consecration, and, to use his own expression, had been pagans. Your Serenity did indeed order him to be driven from Rome and to return to his native land. But he treats your judgements with contempt, and though frequently arrested, remains on the spot, making up to the poorer inhabitants by paying them, and is not afraid to rebaptise those whose allegiance he has bought. In fact he is not bestowing anything, but robbing them of what they had already obtained, for it is obvious that baptism cannot be conferred twice.

1 *Conventus*.

2 Urbanus of Parma: cf. Pietri 1996, 741–45.

3 See Pietri 1996, 737 n. 2.

4 A written answer from the imperial chancery.

5 Restitutus, the bishop of Carthage, had presided over the council of Rimini in 359, and in the end signed Constantius' *Homoian* creed. See Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius*, II.16 translated in Wickham 1997, 86. In his reply, *Coll. Avell.* 13, Gratian did not take up the hint that he should take action against Restitutus.

6 *CTh* 16.6.1 (376), 2 (377).

7 Claudianus was consecrated Donatist bishop of Rome 376/7. In response to this petition Gratian ordered him to return to Africa, where he founded a community of schismatic Donatists; see W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, Oxford 1952, 206–07.

8. Finally, the faction of Ursinus has made such advances that after they had won the support of Isaac, a Jew who desecrated the heavenly mysteries by returning to the synagogue,¹ an attempt was made on the life of our holy brother Damasus, the blood of innocent people was spilt there, dishonest schemes were set up, which under what is clearly divine inspiration the foresight of your Clemency is opposing, and the Church was almost entirely paralysed by means of that fraudulent plot, with the consequence that while the man, whose duty it is to be the judge over all, was² making his own defence, there was nobody in a position to sit in judgement over apostates, or at any rate over members of the gang that had invaded the episcopate.³

9. Therefore because by the judgement of your Serenity the innocence of our above-mentioned brother Damasus has been established, and his probity proclaimed, and Isaac himself has been unable to prove the accusation which he had launched, and has suffered the fate which he deserved,⁴ to avoid our seeming to make ourselves a nuisance to you by raising numerous legal cases in future, we ask your Clemency, that your Piety deign to order that any bishop who has been condemned either by the sentence of Damasus,⁵ or by that of us bishops who are Catholics,⁶ and yet wishes to retain his church illegally, or who when summoned by a court of bishops obstinately refuses to appear, is to be summoned and brought to the city of Rome either by the illustrious praetorian prefects of your Italy,⁷ or by its vicar; or if a trial of this kind should arise in more remote regions,⁸ that the investigation be brought before

1 Isaac had been baptised. It is claimed that he returned to Judaism.

2 I.e. Damasus, bishop of Rome

3 Isaac seems to have accused Damasus on a criminal charge arising out of the serious civil disturbances that had accompanied his struggle with Ursinus for the papacy, before the *prae-fectus urbi* Maximinus. Rufinus, *HE* 11.10 states that clerics were tortured. Damasus was acquitted by the emperor.

4 He had been exiled to Spain (*Coll. Avell.* 13.5).

5 I.e. of Damasus, bishop of Rome.

6 I.e. the Roman synod of Catholic bishops.

7 The plural 'prefects' calls for comment. In 378 and perhaps 379 Ausonius and Hesperius were joint prefects of Gaul, Italy, Africa and Illyricum. In his reply the emperor mentions the prefectures of Italy (which included Illyricum and Africa) and that of Gaul separately, thus relating his ruling to the normal administrative arrangement. The vicar is defined as 'of your Italy' presumably to distinguish him from the suburbicarian vicar.

8 Logically this should mean prefectures more remote than the one mentioned in chapter 9. If so, the bishops would be asking for Roman jurisdiction over the bishops of Oriens. But perhaps the reference is only to the more remote regions in the Western prefectures.

PETITION OF COUNCIL TO GRATIAN AND VALENTINIAN II 253

the metropolitan of that region,¹ or if the man is himself a metropolitan, he is to make his defence without delay nowhere other than at Rome, or before such judges as the bishop of Rome shall appoint for him, with, however, the provision that those who have been deposed must be banished from the territory of the city² in which they exercised their priesthood, and only from that territory, so that they cannot shamelessly seize once more what has been lawfully taken away from them. However, if there is a suspicion of favouritism or partiality on the part of a metropolitan, or of any other bishop, the accused should be permitted to appeal to the bishop of Rome or a synod of at least fifteen neighbouring bishops. But whatever bishop has incurred exclusion through this procedure is to keep silent and take no further action, and if he does not fear the judgement of God, he is to be made to sin less even by compulsion, so that being at last at peace and in harmony we may henceforth give appropriate thanks before our God to your Serenity.

10. Our above-mentioned brother Damasus, seeing that he has received the distinction of your verdict (of acquittal) in his case, ought not be placed in a position inferior to those who are his equals in office,³ but whom he excels in the prerogative of the apostolic see, (which is what he would be) if he was seen to be subject to jurisdiction of the public courts,⁴ from which your law has exempted priests.⁵ In making this request he⁶ does not appear to be refusing to accept the judgement after the verdict has been pronounced,⁷ but rather to be claiming a privilege, which you have awarded. As far as the public laws are concerned what life can be safer than one which relies on a judgement of your Clemency? As for the fact that in order to display the clear conscience of a bishop he submitted to the stricter jurisdiction of bishops, by whom not only social but also personal standing is weighed

1 Gratian's reply seemingly accepts the request : '*si in longinquioribus partibus ... ferocitas talis emergerit ... omnis eius causae dictio ad metropolitani in eadem provincia episcopi deducatur examen*' (if such a gross breach of discipline should arise in more remote regions ... the entire pleading of that case should be taken to the investigation of the metropolitan in the same province) (*Coll. Avell.* 13.12).

2 *Civitas*.

3 *Munere*.

4 I have translated *videatur subiectus* instead of Zelzer's *videantur subiecti*.

5 See c. 2 of this letter.

6 This is the first time we are told that the request is made by Damasus personally, not the bishops collectively.

7 Which is what according to c. 8 of the bishops' letter ought not to be allowed.

in the balance,¹ (he did this) in case a second slanderer might arise, who while trying to injure the above mentioned² would admittedly not be able to harm him, protected as he is by his innocence, but might by attacking its ministers, damage the faith.

11. Accept also this other suggestion by which the holy man desires to confer something on your Piety rather than to obtain something for himself, and not to derogate from anybody's position, but to enhance that of the emperors. For he is not asking for something new but invoking ancestral precedents (with his request) that if a case involving the bishop of Rome is not entrusted to his own council for judging,³ he should make his defence before the imperial consistory.⁴ For when Silvester was accused by sacrilegious persons at Rome he pleaded his own case before your ancestor Constantine.⁵ The scriptures furnish similar precedents, namely, that when the holy apostle Paul was suffering violence at the hands of a governor, he appealed to Caesar and was sent to Caesar.⁶ Accordingly let your Clemency be the first to examine the case, and discern whether a matter requiring investigation emerges, so that in accordance with the ruling you have deigned to give some time ago, the nature of the facts of the case is inquired into by a judge, but the decision as to the verdict is not demanded from him. So it will be brought about that henceforth no depraved and infamous individual is given an unlawful opportunity to accuse the supreme pontiff, or to bear witness against him,⁷ in accordance with the demand of the holy scriptures that no accusation is to be lightly accepted unless there are reliable witnesses, not only if the accused is a bishop, but even if he is a presbyter.⁸ For neither a personal enemy, nor a slanderer, nor any individuals of this sort, that is, the kinds of person that have recently emerged as accusers, ought to be given free play, when their manner of life inspires no belief, and the religion of the priest rejects the use of torture on them.

1 *Non nominis sed etiam morum ratio.*

2 Pope Damasus.

3 I.e. a synod of bishops summoned by the pope to Rome.

4 This is the general view, but Girardet argues that a court assembled and presided over by the emperor but consisting mainly of bishops is meant, see Girardet 1994, 19–20.

5 Silvester I, pope 314–35. This seems to be a reference to an otherwise unknown version of the Silvester legend.

6 Acts 25.11ff.

7 The request for a special legal procedure for cases involving accusations against the bishop of Rome was not granted.

8 1 Tim. 5.19.

LETTER ON THE ALTAR OF VICTORY

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 10 (MAUR. 57) AMBROSE TO THE USURPER EUGENIUS

Introduction

This letter was sent in 394 to the usurper Eugenius, whom Ambrose had avoided meeting by leaving Milan before Eugenius' arrival.¹ Ambrose does not explain the precise circumstances which induced him to break his silence and to write this, his first personal letter to Eugenius. The most likely reason is that the usurper was now in Milan and recognised, in the west at least, as the emperor, and that there was no reason to anticipate that he would disappear in the foreseeable future. So Ambrose began to build a personal relationship, and he did this by explaining his continuing absence from Milan.² The reason Ambrose gives for withdrawing from Milan, and so avoiding a meeting with Eugenius, is 'fear of God', because Eugenius had made concessions to the pagan cults of Rome. Ambrose explains that he has merely been continuing the stand he had taken in the affair of the altar of Victory in 384.³ But this is not entirely convincing, because the concession Eugenius had made to the pagan senators did not involve the restoration of the endowments to pagan cults, but merely personal presents to the envoys, which the latter might or might not choose to spend on pagan cult.⁴ Ambrose is even less convincing when he justifies his failure to answer letters Eugenius has written him since his proclamation in August 392, on the ground that he anticipated 'that this thing' (the gifts to the pagan senators) would happen.⁵

1 On the Eugenius episode see also *Ep. ex.* 2 and 3, pp. 216–20 above.

2 McLynn 1994, 343 n.174.

3 Cf. *Epp.* 72 and 73.

4 But in the circumstances it was probably a reasonable assumption that Eugenius' gift would be used to benefit the temples.

5 *Ep. ex.* 10.11.

It looks as if Ambrose has constructed a religious justification for behaviour that was in fact motivated by secular political considerations: a cautious avoidance of any action that could be interpreted as support for the usurper.¹ Although this letter clearly is intended to establish a diplomatic relationship with Eugenius, Ambrose did not return to Milan before Eugenius had left it to meet the army of Theodosius early in August 394.²

Though justification of Ambrose's secession from Milan is the purpose of the letter, its central theme is criticism of Eugenius' alleged subsidy to pagan cults. Ambrose summarises his own part in the defeat of Symmachus' petition to restore the subsidies together with the altar of Victory in 384/5, and he mentions two further occasions when the senate had unsuccessfully petitioned for the restoration. Paulinus, Ambrose's biographer, used material from this letter for his narrative of the altar of Victory controversy.³ One wonders whether Ambrose actually edited the original letter to Eugenius so that it would supplement the narrative of letters 72, 72a and 73 of the *Collection*.⁴

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 10

To the most clement emperor Eugenius Ambrose the bishop.

1. The reason for my withdrawal was fear of God, to whom I am in the habit of referring all my actions as much as I can. I never turn my mind away from him, and I do not value the favour of any man higher than that of Christ. For I do no one an injury if I prefer God to everybody else, and trusting in him I am not afraid to tell you emperors the truth as I see it. Therefore I will not hesitate to take up with you, most clement emperor, something that I did not hesitate to take up with other emperors. And in order to preserve the chronological order, I will briefly survey the events, which are relevant to this business.

1 As Symmachus had compromised himself almost disastrously with the usurper Maximus in 387/8.

2 *Ep. ex.* 2(61).2.

3 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 26–27. He actually misread the letter, with the result that he dates Ambrose's two altar of Victory letters (*Epp.* 72 and 73) to after 391.

4 It might perhaps be suggested that the *epistulae extra collectionem* had been purposively selected and set aside where Paulinus found them, precisely so that they might be used by a future biographer, or alternatively to be eventually published as an eleventh volume of letters?

2. That most distinguished man Symmachus, when he was prefect of the city, petitioned the younger Valentinian of august memory to order that the resources which had been taken away from the temples should be restored to them.¹ He performed his role in accordance with his own convictions and on behalf of his own cult. Surely I too as bishop was obliged to remember my part. I presented two petitions to the emperors² in which I indicated that it was impossible for a Christian to restore a payment for the expenses of sacrifices. When these payments were abolished it had not been on my advice, but now my advice was that they should not be authorised, for the reason that the emperors would appear to be making a donation to idolatry, and not merely a restitution. For Valentinian could not properly be said to have restored something, that he had not himself taken away. He was in fact making a voluntary contribution to the expenses of superstition. To conclude, if he did this, he would subsequently either stay away from the church, or if he came he would either not find a bishop at all, or he would find one who would oppose him in the church.³ Nor could he offer the excuse that he was only a catechumen, since not even catechumens are allowed to subsidise the expenses of idolatry.⁴

3. My petitions were read in the consistory.⁵ There were present Bauto, the most distinguished *magister militum* and *comes*, and Rumoridus, of the same rank, who from earliest childhood was devoted to the pagan religion.⁶ Valentinian then listened to my argument, and took no action other than what our faith required. The counts agreed with their ruler.

4. On a later occasion⁷ I spoke my mind also in the presence of the most clement emperor Theodosius, and I did not hesitate to address him face to face, and after a delegation of the senate with a petition of that kind been announced (though not the whole senate had made that demand),⁸ the

1 *Ep.* 72a; see above pp. 69–78.

2 *Epp.* 72 and 73, presented to Valentinian II, though addressed, as all such letters were, to all emperors, that is to Theodosius as well; see above pp. 61–69, 78–94.

3 *Ep.* 72.13.

4 Shortly before his death Valentinian is said to have wished Ambrose to come to Gaul to baptise him: Ambrose, *De ob. Val.* 23; see below pp. 374–75.

5 *Ep.* 73.1 shows that only *Ep.* 72 was read in the consistory, and that the second letter, *Ep.* 73 was a purely academic statement of the case. In fact *Ep.* 73.1 suggests that the real decision had been made even before Ambrose wrote *Ep.* 72.

6 *PLRE* I.159 and 786.

7 Probably in autumn 389, while Theodosius was in Italy after the defeat of Maximus.

8 *Intimata senatus legatione huiusmodi*: Ambrose has left the precise terms of the request obscure, as he has the precise content of the emperor's reply.

emperor delayed¹ his assent to my submission.² And so for some considerable number of days I did not approach the emperor, and I did not incur his displeasure, because he knew that I was not doing it for my advantage, but because it was for his own good, and that of my soul,³ that *I was not ashamed to speak in the presence of the king*.⁴

5. A second embassy sent by the senate to Valentinian, emperor of august memory, to the Gallic provinces, was unable to extort anything from him, and on that occasion I was not there, nor had I on that occasion written anything to him.⁵

6. But when your clemency assumed the reins of government we learnt that these benefits were subsequently granted to men pre-eminent in the state, but pagans in their religious observance. And it could perhaps be said, august emperor, that you have made a donation not to temples, but to men who have deserved well of yourself. However, you know well that the fear of God demands consistent and steadfast conduct, as is regularly demonstrated in the cause of freedom not only by priests, but also by the men in your armies, and those who are numbered among your provincials. When you had become emperor envoys petitioned you to make restitution to the temples; you did not do it. The demand was made a second time by others, you resisted; and yet later did you really think it was right to make the gift to the very men who were making the petition?

7. Although the power of the emperor is great, just consider, emperor, how great God is. He sees *the hearts of all men*.⁶ He probes the innermost conscience. He knows all things before they happen.⁷ He knows the secrets of your breast. You will not allow yourselves to be deceived, and yet you

1 Reading *distulit* for Zelzer's *detulit*. For if Theodosius simply 'gave his assent' (*assensionem detulit*) why did Ambrose think it necessary to stay away from court for some time after? On Ambrose's absence from court cf. *Ep. ex.* 11.2.

2 *Insinuatio*.

3 On my reading, Ambrose stayed away from court to put pressure on Theodosius to make up his mind, and give the assent, which he obviously did eventually, because the funds were not restored, though Ambrose does not expressly say so here. Theodosius did, however, resent Ambrose's intervention, for he ordered that henceforth Ambrose should not be informed of the proceedings in the consistory. See *Ep. ex.* 11.2 and McLynn 1994, 314.

4 Ps. 119.46 (Vulg. 118.46).

5 After 391, when Theodosius had returned to Constantinople, leaving Valentinian with the general Arbogast in Gaul, at least nominally in charge of the West.

6 Acts 1.24.

7 Dan.13.24 (Vulg.).

wish to hide something from God? Did you not have any premonition? If they pressed their case so persistently, was it not up to you, emperor, out of respect for the supreme and true and living God to oppose them with even greater persistence, and to refuse something that was an outrage against the sacred law?

8. Who would mind your giving whatever you please to others? We do not scrutinise your generosity, and we are not envious of the good fortune of others, but we are the interpreters of the faith. How will you be able (after this) to offer your gifts to Christ? Few will judge you by your actions, all by your (perceived) intentions. Whatever they will do (with the resources you have given them) will be counted as your action, only what they will not do will be considered theirs.¹ Even if you are emperor, that is all the more reason for being obedient to God. How will it be possible for the priests of Christ to distribute your gifts?²

9. A problem of this kind arose in earlier times, but then persecution was defeated by the faith of our fathers,³ and paganism gave way. For when the quinquennial games were held in the city of Tyre, and the king of Antioch came to watch, that blackguard Jason⁴ dispatched 'spectators',⁵ who were 'Antiochenes',⁶ to fetch 300 silver drachmae from Jerusalem. He intended them for the sacrifice to Hercules. But our fathers would not give the money to pagans, but sending trustworthy persons, demanded that the money should not be expended on the sacrifice, as this was not fitting, but used for other expenses. And it was decided, even though Jason insisted that the silver had been sent for the sacrifice to Hercules, that what had been sent ought indeed to be accepted; but because those who had brought the silver, moved by zeal and devotion to their cult, persistently remonstrated⁷ that they should

1 I.e. people will not ask whether Eugenius was right to be generous to these individuals; but whatever they do with his gifts Eugenius will be thought to have intended, and will be given the credit or the blame for it.

2 Cf. *Ep.* 72.14.

3 The 'fathers' are in fact the leading Jews of Jerusalem in the 170s. On the episode see 2 Macc. 4.18–20.

4 The king is the Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes; Jason the Jewish high priest appointed by him in 175 BC.

5 *θεωποῖς* in Septuagint.

6 Members of a corporation of hellenising Jews at Jerusalem, see E. Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, Berlin 1937, 62–65.

7 *Resistebant*: this resistance was surely vocal, but the same word is used to describe Ambrose's response to Eugenius (c. 11), which was to avoid all contact whether physical or by letter.

contribute not to the sacrifice, but to other necessary expenses, the money was transferred to the construction of ships. So although they sent the money as they were compelled to do, they did not send it for the sacrifice, but for other expenses of the state.

10. And they won in the end. They could have kept silent, but they would have been false to their faith since they knew where the money was going. That is why they sent men who feared God, who were to ensure that what was being sent was assigned not to the temple but to the expenses of ships. They entrusted the money to men who would argue the case of the holy law. The justification of their conduct was its outcome, for it cleared their conscience.¹ If men, who were in the power of another, safeguarded themselves in this way, there can be no doubt what you, emperor, ought to have done. Nobody, assuredly, was compelling you, nobody had you in his power: you ought to have consulted a bishop.

11. At that time² when I resisted, although I was the only one to resist actively, I was certainly not the only one to want to resist, and not the only one to advise resistance. Since I was therefore committed by my own words before God and before men, I realised that I had no physical or moral alternative to resistance, except as far as my own safety was concerned, because I could not retreat unobtrusively. At any rate I suppressed my grief for a long time, I concealed it for a long time, and thought it right not to give a hint to anyone. Now I must not conceal it any longer. I am no longer at liberty to keep silent. At the beginning of your reign I did not reply to your letter because I anticipated that this situation would arise. Finally, when you were demanding a reply, and I was not replying, I said (to myself): 'This is the issue, that I think that this (concession) will be wrested from him'.³

1 Zelzer reads: *index rerum effectus fuit, qui absolvit conscientiam*. The old edition read *iudex*.

2 Ambrose is referring to the stand he had taken in the affair of the altar of Victory (*tunc*). The line of argument here is the following: since Ambrose's resistance to the restoration of the subsidy to the pagan cults was known, he was committed to it before God and men, and he was therefore also committed to maintaining this stand under the new emperor. But since to express dissent to Eugenius openly would have been disrespectful to him 'to whom honour is due' (Rom. 13.7), Ambrose has chosen to have no communications with Eugenius at all up to now, when he can remain silent no longer.

3 The 'concession' is the granting of money which pagans will use for pagan ritual. The words in brackets have been added to bring out what I think is the meaning of the sentence.

LETTER ON THE ALTAR OF VICTORY

261

12. However, when there was occasion to perform my duty¹ on behalf of anxious individuals, I both wrote letters and made petition,² and in so doing showed that while in issues involving God I am motivated by a fear which is altogether proper, and I do not give flattery priority over the state of my soul, yet when it comes to causes on behalf of which it is right to petition you I too display the dutiful diligence which we owe to the powers that be, as it is written: *Honour to whom honour is due, tribute to whom tribute.*³ For if I have shown sincere respect to a private individual, how could I fail to show it to the same person as emperor?⁴ But as you wish respect to be shown to yourself, allow us to show respect to him whom you wish to be acknowledged⁵ to be the source of your imperial power.

1 The writing of letters of this kind was something bishops considered part of their duty.

2 Evidently Ambrose had written to Eugenius letters of recommendation, and petitions for men who faced accusations in court, even though he abstained from writing personal letters. None of these has been preserved.

3 Rom. 13.7

4 Ambrose has evidently been on friendly terms with Eugenius at some time in the past.

5 As a usurper, and a Christian, Eugenius was necessarily anxious to establish that his power was from God, i.e. to legitimise his position.

LETTER ON THE MASSACRE AT THESSALONICA

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 11 (MAUR. 51)

This famous letter was written in 390,¹ after a large number of civilians had been massacred at Thessalonica in retaliation for the killing in a riot of the Gothic general Butheric. The retaliation was ordered some time after the killing, and an imperial letter revoking the order came too late. In the letter Ambrose tells the emperor that he will not be able to give him communion while remains in his present state of sin, and that he must show repentance, as David had done after the murder of Uriah. Theodosius duly complied, and came to church without his imperial robes until Christmas when Ambrose again admitted him to communion.² McLynn has for the first time explained how the penance of Theodosius was possible in terms of the political situation, and of the relations between bishop and emperor,³ by examining as a historical problem what, following the accounts of Paulinus and especially Theodoret,⁴ has been treated as an astonishing *exemplum* of an outspoken bishop courageously doing his duty of recalling a ruler to his moral obligations. McLynn brings out the extreme, one might say un-Ambrosian, tactfulness of the letter. He also shows that in the letter Ambrose advocates a course which will avoid precisely the kind of public humiliation of the emperor by the bishop which Theodoret has described in his dramatisation of the episode,

1 The generally accepted date of 390 is based on Theodoret and Rufinus. The other sources relate the incident to the defeat of Eugenius in 394. But it does not easily fit into the relations between Ambrose and Theodosius in 394 (cf. *Epp. ex.* 2 and 3 of 394). It has also been argued in favour of 390 that the arrest of a charioteer for homosexual assault, which provoked the riot at Thessalonica, was thought to have been a consequence of the law *Mos. et Rom. Leg. Coll.* 5.3 of 390, and that *CTh* 9.40.13, which we are told was issued as part of Theodosius' penance, was probably issued on 18 August in AD 390 (Seeck, *Regesten*, 92–93).

2 See Rufinus, *HE* 11.18; Sozomen, *HE* 7.25; Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 24–25; Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 5.26.

3 McLynn 1994, 315–30.

4 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 24; Theodoret, *HE* 5.17.

or indeed the facing down of the emperor by the bishop which Ambrose, writing to his sister, suggests (perhaps slightly misleadingly) followed his sermon on the synagogue at Callinicum.¹ Even if McLynn's suggestion that Theodosius' penance for the massacre represented a consciously planned publicity triumph may be slightly anachronistic, he does give a plausible account of what actually happened, and an explanation of how this episode, seemingly so unprecedented, was possible in the conditions of the Roman empire in the fourth century. One may wonder why Ambrose did not include this letter in his *Collection*. He described Theodosius' penance for the massacre at Thessalonica in the *De obitu Theodosii* which he did include.²

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 11

Ambrose to the most august emperor Theodosius.

1. The memory of old friendship is sweet, and I remember the favour of benefits which you have with the utmost favour bestowed upon others in response to my numerous acts of intercession. Hence it can be surmised that it was not in a spirit of ingratitude that I had the temerity to decline to be present at your arrival, which previously I always most ardently longed for. But the reason why I did this I will briefly explain.³

2. I saw that I alone of all at your court had been stripped of the natural right⁴ of hearing, with the consequence that I had also been deprived of the power of speaking. For you have frequently been offended because I obtained knowledge of a number of decisions which had been taken in the consistory.⁵ As a result, I no longer enjoy what is available to all,⁶ even though

1 *Ep. ex.* 1 (Maur. 41).

2 *De ob. Theod.* 34.

3 Ambrose found it tactful to approach his real theme, the massacre, indirectly. He first (cc. 2–3) explains that he could not attend at court because the embargo on information from the consistory being passed on to him meant that he could not speak his mind there without endangering his sources of information. It is only in c. 6 that we learn the reason why at this point it was so important to keep full freedom of speech: the massacre of Thessalonica.

4 *Ius naturae*.

5 The affair of the synagogue of Callinicum (*Ep.* 74; *Epp. ex.* 1 and 1a) and the senatorial embassy pleading for the return of the subsidy to the state cults of Rome (*Ep. ex.* 10.4) happened not long before this letter. Evidently the emperor resented Ambrose's initiatives and tried to prevent their recurrence.

6 The embargo on information about the business of the consistory being passed on to Ambrose cannot have been in force for very long, because c. 6 shows that Ambrose had been

the lord Jesus says: *nothing is hidden that shall not be made manifest*.¹ I nevertheless showed as much respect as I could to your imperial will, for I made sure that you would have no cause for anger by acting in such a way that it was impossible for any report relating to imperial decisions to reach me;² and I saved myself from being at court in the embarrassing position of either not hearing anything because everybody was afraid to speak, and so getting myself a reputation for turning a blind eye,³ or alternatively of having to listen with my ears open, but my mouth firmly closed, so that it would be impossible for me to report what I had heard, in case I endangered the people who would be suspected of having informed me.⁴

3. What in the circumstances was I to do? Hear nothing? But I could not have blocked my ears with the wax of the old myths.⁵ Disclose what I heard? But I was duty-bound to avoid my words having the consequence which I feared your commands would: the shedding of blood. Was I to hold my tongue? But that would have been the most miserable course of all, for my conscience would have been fettered, my voice silenced. And what about the text stating that if the priest will not admonish the wrongdoer, the wrongdoer will die in his guilt, but the priest will be liable to punishment because he did not warn the wrongdoer?⁶

4. Listen to this, august emperor. That you are zealous for the faith, I cannot deny. That you fear God, I do not dispute. But you have been born with a passionate nature. When there is somebody around to calm you, you quickly channel it into pity, but if somebody inflames it, you let your passion grow to such a pitch that you can scarcely control it. May nobody ever be there to inflame your passion, unless there is also somebody to allay it. Personally I am happy to leave it to you to deal with your passion. You are in control of yourself, and by striving to achieve piety, you are mastering your own nature.

able to intervene in earlier discussions of the punishment to be imposed for the murder of the general at Thessalonica.

1 Lk. 8.17.

2 As he was not at court he could not be told what had been decided there. Ambrose argues (with slight irony) that his absence, far from showing disrespect, was actually intended to assist implementation of the emperor's command that he should receive no information.

3 The reader of the letter does not yet know that 'what has been done' is the massacre of Thessalonica, though Theodosius might have guessed, because Ambrose had warned him before the massacre had taken place (c. 6).

4 I have translated this rather involved sentence quite freely.

5 Hom. *Od.* 12.173–77.

6 Simplified after Ezek. 3.18.

5. Rather than risk arousing that passionate nature in yours by any public act of mine, I preferred to leave it to you to deal with it in private.¹ And so I preferred to fall somewhat short in the performance of my office rather than in humility, and to have other men ask why I was not exercising my episcopal authority, rather than that you should find any lack of respect in me, who am so devoted to you. And I did this so that you should master your passion, and then be free to decide your policy yourself. My excuse was illness of the body,² which did indeed weigh me down, and which only men of merciful disposition could have lightened. In other circumstances I would have preferred to die rather than fail to wait two or three days for your arrival; but I had no option.

6. An act was committed at Thessalonica which is unprecedented in human memory, an act whose perpetration I could not prevent, an act which previously, in so many petitions, I had warned would be an atrocity, an act which you yourself condemned as brutal³ when you revoked it too late.⁴ That act I could not extenuate. When the news was first heard a synod had assembled because of the arrival of the Gallic bishops: no one was there who did not lament, nobody who took it lightly. Your being in communion with Ambrose was not seen as a ground for acquitting you. No, the indignation at your deed would swell still further, if no one was saying that you would need to be reconciled to God.⁵

7. Or are you ashamed, emperor, to do what was done by David, the king and prophet and according to the flesh, forefather of the family of Christ? David was told that a rich man, who had numerous flocks, on the arrival of

1 Ambrose explains why he has not protested in public against Theodosius' punitive order before it resulted in the massacre. Public protest would only have inflamed Theodosius' easily kindled anger further. Furthermore, if he had protested in public he would not have shown the respect he owed to the emperor to whom he remained devoted. In all Ambrose admits that he could have done more.

2 *Aegritudinem corporis gravem ... viris mitioribus ... levandam*. Ambrose is in a sense admitting that his 'illness' was diplomatic, but he qualifies this by saying that he did indeed suffer from severe physical depression at the prospect that in his anger Theodosius would order some violent punishment, a depression which could only be cured if the emperor showed mercy.

3 *Grave factum putasti*.

4 The sentence shows that between the killing of the general and the massacre, inflicted as a punishment, there had been an interval during which the punishment to be inflicted on the Thessalonians was discussed at court, and Ambrose had several opportunities to protest. We also learn that Theodosius had actually revoked the order, but too late to stop the massacre.

5 I.e. if Ambrose was not now making the stand, represented by this letter.

a guest seized the only sheep of a poor man and killed it, and he recognised that in this he was himself being accused because this was what he had done and he said: *I have sinned against the Lord*.¹ Don't therefore take it ill, emperor, if you are told: 'you have done what the prophet told king David that he had done'. For if you listen to this attentively, and say: *I have sinned against the Lord*, if you repeat that royal and prophetic saying: *O come, let us worship and fall down before him, and let us weep before the Lord our maker*,² you too will be told: 'Because you have repented, *the Lord will forgive your sin and you shall not die*'.³

8. On a second occasion when David had ordered the people to be numbered, his heart smote him and he said to the Lord: *I have sinned greatly in that I have done this word*,⁴ and now, Lord, take away the iniquity of your servant, because *I have sinned*⁵ exceedingly. And again Nathan⁶ was sent to him to let him choose which of three conditions he wanted: three years of famine upon the earth, or three months as a fugitive from his enemies, or three days of death on earth.⁷ And David answered: *All three cause me great distress. But let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are very many, and let me not fall into the hands of man*.⁸ But his offence was that he wished to know the number of all the people he had with him, knowledge which he ought to have reserved for God.

9. And when, as Scripture tells us, death had been let loose among the people of Israel, on the very first day, at dinner time⁹ when David saw the angel striking down the people, he said: *I have sinned, I the shepherd have done wrong, but this flock, what have they done? Let your hand be against me and against the house of my father*.¹⁰ So the Lord repented and ordered the angel to spare the people,¹¹ but David was to offer sacrifice. For in those

1 2 Sam. 12.1ff.

2 Ps. 95.6 (Vulg. 94.6).

3 2 Sam. 12.13.

4 1 Chron. 21.8, but where Ambrose has 'word' (*verbum*) Vulg. reads *hoc* (this), as does RSV.

5 *Deliqui vehementer*, but Vulg: *insipienter* (foolishly).

6 Vulg. and RSV have Gad.

7 1 Chron. 21.12.

8 1 Chron. 21.13, with some difference from both Vulg. and RSV.

9 The reference to 'dinner time' is neither in Vulg. nor in RSV.

10 1 Chron. 21.17.

11 In the biblical account God orders the angel to spare the people even before David had taken the guilt on himself.

days there were sacrifices for sin, but these have now become sacrifices of penance. And so by that act of humility David made himself more acceptable to the Lord. For it should not be a matter for surprise that a man sins, but it is reprehensible if he does not acknowledge that he has done wrong, if he does not humble himself before God.

10. Job, a holy man and one of power in the world, says: *I have not hidden my sin but declared it before all the people.*¹ To the barbaric king Saul Jonathan his own son said: *Do not sin against your servant David and why do you sin against innocent blood to slay David without a cause?*² For though he was king he would nevertheless sin if he slew an innocent man. Finally David himself, when he was already in possession of his kingdom, and heard that the innocent Abner had been slain by Joab the leader of his army, said: *I and my kingdom are now and for ever innocent of the blood of Abner son of Ner*, and he fasted in sorrow.³

11. I have written these things not to embarrass you but so that these examples involving kings may induce you to lift this burden of sin from your kingship; and you will lift it by humbling your soul before God. You are a man and temptation has come your way. Conquer it! Sin cannot be abolished otherwise than by tears and penitence. Neither an angel nor an archangel can do it. The Lord himself who alone can say *I am with you*⁴ does not forgive our sin if we have sinned, unless we show penitence.

12. I persuade, request, encourage, advise because I am filled with grief that you, who set an unprecedented example of piety, who occupied the summit of clemency, who would not allow individuals to be endangered even if they were guilty, do not mourn the destruction of so many innocent people. Although you have been highly successful in battles, although you merit praise in other respects also, nevertheless the crown of your achievements has always been your piety. The devil has envied you this, your most excellent possession. Conquer him while you still have the means to conquer. Do not add another sin to your sin to cling to something which has proved injurious to many who have clung to it.

13. I, certainly for my part, seeing that I am in all other things a debtor to your Piety, (a state of affairs) for which I cannot but be grateful, and that I used to consider that piety of yours superior to that of many emperors, and

1 This is a very free paraphrase of Job 31.33.

2 1 Sam. 19.4–5.

3 2 Sam. 3.28.

4 Mt. 28.20.

to have been equalled by only one.¹ I have, I can claim, no reason why I should display contumacy towards you, but I have reason to be afraid on your behalf. I dare not offer the sacrifice, if you intend to be there. Or is what is not allowed when the blood of one innocent victim has been shed, allowed when the blood has been shed of many?² I do not think so.

14. Lastly I am writing with my own hand what you alone are to read.³ As I hope that the Lord would free me from all tribulations, it has not been by a man, nor by mediation of a man, but by manifest divine intervention that I learnt that it was prohibited to me. For as I was worried, in the very night that I was about to set out,⁴ I dreamt that you had indeed come to the church, but that I was forbidden to offer the sacrifice. Other things I pass over and could have avoided, but I put up with them for love of you, as I think.⁵ May the Lord cause all these things to work out peacefully. Our God admonishes us by a variety of means: through heavenly signs, through the warnings of prophets, even through the visions of sinners he wishes us to learn that we are to pray to him to put an end to disorder, to preserve peace for you, our emperors, and to uphold the faith and tranquillity of the Church, for which it is a benefit that the emperors are Christian and pious.

15. You undoubtedly wish to be approved of by God. *There is a time for everything*,⁶ as it is written: *Lord, there is a time for doing*,⁷ and *a time for being accepted, O God*.⁸ You will make your offering, when you have received permission to sacrifice, when your offering has become acceptable to God. Don't you think that it would please me to keep the favour of the emperor, and to act according to your wishes, if only the case permitted it? Prayer on its own is also a sacrifice, one which obtains pardon, while the

1 Does Ambrose mean Gratian? Theodosius had recently married Galla, a daughter of Valentinian I and sister of Gratian. One might think that the reference is to Constantine, but Ambrose had strong reservations concerning the first Christian emperor. See above p. 175.

2 Seven thousand, according to Theodoret, *HE* 5.17.

3 I think this means that up to here the letter has been dictated, and that the rest is in Ambrose's hand. He wants to emphasise the personal nature of the communication; this is the priest's confidential counsel to a parishioner, if a very elevated one.

4 To go out to meet Theodosius as he was returning to Milan.

5 This is very obscure. But the following sentence suggests that Ambrose had witnessed some disturbances or demonstrations which he has interpreted as divine warnings? One might think of the death of baby Gratian (c. 16–17). But the context suggests some trouble affecting Ambrose himself.

6 Ec. 3.1.

7 Ps. 119.126 (Vulg. 118.126).

8 Ps. 69.13 (Vulg. 68.14).

offering would give offence, because the former expresses humility, the latter contempt. We have God's word that he considers it more important that his commandments are followed than that sacrifice is offered.¹ God proclaims this. Moses announces it to the people. Paul preaches it to the nations. Do that which you know is going to be more pleasing on the present occasion. It is written: *I want mercy, rather than sacrifice.*² Are we not therefore to consider true Christians those who condemn their sin, rather than those who insist on justifying it? *At the beginning of his speech the just man accuses himself.*³ The just man is one who accuses himself when he has sinned, not he who praises himself.

16. I wish, emperor that previously too I had trusted my instinct rather than your usual behaviour. While I was confident that you are quick to pardon, quick to revoke your sentence, as you have often done, you were forestalled,⁴ and I did not avert what I should have had no reason to fear.⁵ But thanks be to the Lord, who chooses to chastise⁶ his servants to avoid destroying them. This I share with the prophets and you will share with the saints.

17. And ought I not to value the father of Gratian⁷ more than my own eyes? Let your other holy offspring⁸ pardon me (for saying this). I have placed a name, which is dear to me, ahead of those whom I love with equal affection. I love, I cherish, I attend you with prayers. If you believe, me follow my advice, if you believe me, I repeat, acknowledge the truth of what I am saying. If you do not believe me, pardon what I am doing, namely that I am putting God first. May you, august emperor, together with your holy offspring, enjoy enduring peace, in the utmost happiness and prosperity.

1 Cf. Hos. 6.6.

2 Mt. 9.13.

3 A version of Pr. 18.17, differing from Vulg., but very much more from RSV.

4 Theodosius had revoked his order, but too late to prevent it being carried out, cf. c. 6.

5 Ambrose had criticised the imperial order while it was under discussion (c. 6). Here he suggests that he could have done more.

6 How has Theodosius been chastised? S. Rebenich, 'Gratian, a son of Theodosius, and the birth of Galla Placidia', *Historia* 34 (1985), 372–85, argues from *De ob. Theod.* 40 that Theodosius and Galla had a short-lived son, Gratian, as well as the daughter Pulcheria. Could it be that the baby son had died recently? This would make the parallel with 2 Sam. 11–12 (David and Nathan/Theodosius and Ambrose) even closer.

7 Theodosius' short-lived son.

8 I have translated *dent* rather than *debent*. The offspring are Arcadius and Honorius.

LETTERS OF AMBROSE AND GRATIAN

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER OF GRATIAN TO AMBROSE

When the emperor Gratian was about to set out on campaign he asked Ambrose for a treatise *On the Faith* (*De fide*).¹ Ambrose composed two books and gave them to Gratian. Some time after Gratian had read them he wrote this letter asking Ambrose to send him ‘the same work which you gave me some time ago’. The letter was not preserved among Ambrose’s letters, but has come down to us together with Ambrose’s *On the Holy Spirit* (*De Spiritu Sancto*).² Ambrose’s *Ep. ex. 12* is the bishop’s reply to Gratian’s letter. Although that letter was not included in the *Collection*, it has been inserted here before the letter of Ambrose which answers it.

The precise date of the letter is uncertain, first half of 379³ and spring 380⁴ have been suggested. But it was evidently written not very long before *Ep. ex. 12*, and there seem to be very strong, if not absolutely conclusive, arguments for dating this to autumn of 379.⁵ The most probable date for Gratian’s letter is therefore early autumn of 379.

The letter is a key document in the obscure history of the early years of Ambrose’s episcopate, providing evidence about his early relations with the emperor Gratian, and more specifically for the date and circumstances in which Ambrose became an active opponent of the Arians. Williams and McLynn reconstruct the story slightly differently, but both agree that Gratian only abandoned his policy of religious neutrality in 381 when he transferred his residence to the north of Italy.⁶ In this volume the view is taken that

¹ *De fide* 3.1.

² The text is printed preceding that of *On the Holy Spirit* (*De spiritu sancto*) in *CSEL* 79.3–4.

³ Williams 1995, 148.

⁴ McLynn 1994, 114–15.

⁵ See below p. 273.

⁶ Williams 1995, 135n53, and McLynn 1994, 90–91, 115–18.

Gratian's policy changed more gradually, and that he began to favour the Nicenes as early as 379.¹ So we would argue against McLynn that the tone of the present letter, and the fact that it was written in the emperor's own hand,² is strong evidence that at that time, Gratian was already an admirer and supporter of Ambrose, though this does not mean that at this stage the emperor was actively enforcing Nicene Christianity in the west in the way Theodosius was doing in the east.

TRANSLATION OF THE LETTER OF GRATIAN TO AMBROSE

The emperor Gratian to Ambrose, pious bishop of almighty God.³

1. I very much desire that people I keep in my thoughts when absent, and am close to in spirit, I should also be with in flesh. Come quickly then holy bishop of God to teach the true doctrine to one who believes it already, not that I am eager for controversy, or because I would prefer to grasp hold of God in words rather than in my soul; rather so that the revelation of his godhead may take firmer root in a receptive heart.

2. For He will instruct me, whom I do not deny, but confess to be my God and Lord, not imputing to Him that same created nature which I see in myself. I acknowledge that I cannot add anything to Christ, and that my wish is to commend myself to the Father, by praising the Son. I do not fear jealousy on the part of God. I do not think myself so able a eulogist as to be able to enhance his divinity with my words. I am weak and fragile. I proclaim him to the extent of my capacity not of his divinity.

3. What I want from you is that you should give me the same work of yours which you gave me some time ago,⁴ adding to it a faithful discussion of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Prove convincingly by reason and reference to scripture that He is God. May God watch over you for many years, my father, follower of the eternal God whom we worship, Jesus Christ.

1 See above pp. 11 and 246–47.

2 *Ep. ex.* 12.3.

3 The Latin text of this letter is printed in *CSEL* 79.3–4. Also in *CSEL* 80.10.3, cxvi.

4 That is, the first two books of *On the faith* (*De fide*). The Latin text is in *CSEL* 78 (ed. O. Faller 1962) and *PL* 16.549–726; a translation by H. de Romestin in *Some of the Principal Works of St Ambrose*, NPNF 10, reprint 1979, 201–314.

5 Ambrose only completed *On the Holy Spirit* around Easter 381 (McLynn 1944, 120). The text: *CSEL* 15–222; *PL* 16.731–850. English translation by de Romestin 1979, 93–158.

*EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 12 (MAUR. 1)***Introduction**

This letter is obviously a reply to the letter of Gratian.¹ Ambrose repeatedly comments on phrases of the letter which he cites almost verbatim. He apologises for not yet sending the treatise on the Holy Spirit which Gratian had requested, but promises that he will send it. I think that we can be certain that he did not keep the emperor waiting long: the letter was sent not very long after that to which it is a reply.

But when were the two letters written? The starting point of any attempt to solve this problem must be information in the letters themselves. It must, however, be stressed that the information in the letters is insufficient to allow absolutely certain conclusions as to their dates. From the wording of the letter to Gratian it is evident that it was written not very long after Gratian had passed through Milan. It is also clear that Ambrose had not met the emperor on this occasion, for the opening of his letter is an apology for failing to pay his respects to the emperor as he passed through the city. It is also likely that the emperor's journey was not to a scene of war, but away from it; for if he had been marching to war, Ambrose could hardly have failed to mention prayers for victory. Gratian would therefore appear to have been on the way to his residence at Trier from campaigning in Illyricum.

Ambrose's letter served as a covering letter for the despatch of two books of a treatise which must have been the *On the Faith* (*De fide*). This was evidently one of the works Gratian had asked for in his letter.² He had previously seen the books and according to Ambrose approved them. Now we know from the *De fide* itself that its making was commissioned by Gratian, and that the emperor summoned Ambrose into his presence 'to encourage his timidity'.³ That there had been a previous meeting of Ambrose and Gratian and that this had resulted in the establishment of friendly relations between the bishop and the emperor is confirmed by the discourse of affection

1 See above p. 271.

2 The other was a treatise on the Holy Spirit, what became the *De Spiritu Sancto*. But this, as we learn from Ambrose's letter, had not yet been written.

3 *De fide* 3.1. On the view of Barnes accepted in this volume (see p. 273 n. 2 below) this was in winter of 378/9, early in his episcopate, when Ambrose was still an amateur theologian. Hence the timidity.

employed by Gratian in his letter to Ambrose, and the fact that he wrote the letter with his own hand, which certainly implies a personal relationship.¹

Earlier it has been argued that the occasion for the commissioning of the *De fide* was provided by a suggested mission to Gratian at Sirmium which Ambrose performed late in 378 for the purpose of presenting a petition from the Roman synod of 378 to the emperor.² This is only a theory, though a likely one. If this is indeed what happened, the *De fide* was composed and subsequently given³ to the emperor while Ambrose was staying at court at Sirmium in the winter of 378/79. In this case the present exchange of letters will have taken place in autumn of 379 some time after what is known to have been a very brief stay⁴ of Gratian at Milan, during which he did not see Ambrose. It would be just possible that the exchange took place after Gratian had stayed at Milan in March and April 380. But during that longer stay of the emperor in Northern Italy Ambrose could hardly have failed to meet him. Moreover when the emperor departed in 380, it was to fight. The absence from this letter of any mention of prayers for victory makes this later date is less likely. Gratian is not known to have passed through Milan when returning to Trier in late summer 380. So the most likely date for the exchange of letters is autumn of 379.

If Ambrose avoided meeting the emperor it must have been an act of deliberate policy. What motive could he have had at this time? We know that at some time Gratian handed over a church at Milan to the Arians (*Homoians*). We are not told when. But a strong incentive to allow the Arians (*Homoians*) a church at Milan would have been the arrival of Valentinian II and of his mother Justina and other refugees from Illyricum.⁵ We do not know when precisely that happened, but as likely an occasion as any is Gratian's transfer of responsibility for Illyricum, including Sirmium, to Theodosius, and his

1 See *Ep. ex.* 12.3.

2 See above p. 11; the Introduction to *Ep. ex.* 7, and most fully Barnes 1999, 166–74, esp. 167, table of movements of Gratian.

3 Personal handing over, not despatch by letter, is suggested by the phrase *quem dederas*, 'which you had given' in Gratian's letter (c. 3).

4 *CTh* 7.18.2 (21 July, Aquileia), *CJ* 6.32.4 (30 July, Milan), *CTh* 15.5.5 (3 August, Milan), *CTh* 6.28.1 (4 August, perhaps Tres Tabernae, 22 miles S.E. of Milan?). See McLynn 1994, 101–02.

5 See D. H. Williams, 'Ambrose, emperors and *Homoians* in Milan, the first conflict over a basilica', in M. R. Barnes and D. H. Williams (eds), *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, Edinburgh 1993, 127–46. On Arian refugees: cf. *Ep.* 36.28 (Maur. 2), with comments of M. Zelzer *CSEL* 82.10.ii, xxvii.

departure from Sirmium to return to Trier. The *Homoian* widow and the son of Valentinian might well have felt safer under Gratian than under Theodosius, whose Nicene partisanship was surely already known, and who was likely to see a potential rival in the young prince of the Valentinian dynasty.¹ This was early in summer of 379, in fact shortly before Gratian's brief visit to Milan. Ambrose may well have felt angry.

Ambrose's letter is extremely diplomatic. While it is a reply to a letter from the emperor, and a covering letter for the dispatch of two books of *On the Faith*, it also carries two apologies: one for not attending Gratian's ceremonial arrival (*adventus*) at Milan, and another for not sending anything about the Holy Spirit. The argument, or rather conceit, of the letter is that Gratian really needs neither the *On the Faith* which Ambrose has sent, nor the *On the Holy Spirit* (*De Spiritu Sancto*), because the essential points have already been expressed perfectly in the emperor's letter.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 12 (MAUR. 1)

Bishop Ambrose to the most blessed Augustus Gratian, the most Christian prince.²

1. It was not from any lack of affection on my part, most Christian of princes – for I know of no term which would be more accurate or more glorious than this – let me repeat it was not that I lacked feeling, but rather that modesty³ applied a brake to my feeling, and prevented me from rushing to meet your grace. However, even if I was not with you instantly on your return,⁴ I was with you in spirit, I was with you in my prayers, which are a priest's primary duties. [So], I can say, I was with you. In fact when was I ever absent from you seeing that I followed you with total dedication and lived with you heart and soul. To be together in spirit is surely the more

1 On the obscure circumstances of the accession of Theodosius after the death of Valens at the disaster of Adrianople, see H. Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux*, London 1993, 121–22.

2 *Princeps*.

3 *Verecundia*, a quality regularly attributed to Gratian, which Ambrose here invokes in himself.

4 Presumably when Gratian was returning from Sirmium to Trier. I am not convinced by Barnes' argument that 'returning' refers to the second visit to Milan in April 380, with the implication that Ambrose snubbed the emperor on that occasion too (Barnes 1999, 171–72).

important. Every day I would trace your route; and being, [as it were], held in your camp night and day, by my care and concern, I kept watch over you with my prayers, my merit uncertain, but my love unwavering.¹

2. And even when we were offering these prayers for your safety, we were [really] acting in our own interest. There is not a trace of flattery in this, which is something that you do not require, and I consider unworthy of my office, and even more unworthy of the favour you have already shown me. The one who will judge us, He whom you acknowledge, and in whom you believe with implicit faith, is well aware that the very core of my being is fortified by your faith, your safety and your glory; and that my prayers derive not only from public duty, but from my personal affection. For you have given back to me the peace of the Church, and you have stopped the mouths (would you had also stopped the thoughts)² of the faithless, and you have done this no less through the influence of your faith than that of your power.³

3. What am I to say about your recent communication? You wrote the whole letter in your own hand,⁴ making the very letters convey your faith and conviction. In just this way, long ago, Abraham offered as a dish to his guest a calf he had slaughtered with his own hand, and did not seek the help of others in this sacred service.⁵ But whereas he was a private citizen, waiting either on the Lord and his angels, or on the Lord in the guise of his angels, you, emperor, are with royal condescension waiting on the most humble of bishops; for he himself said *as you did to one of the least of these, you did it to me*.⁶

1 The implication of this paragraph is that Ambrose did not meet Gratian during his recent stay at Milan.

2 Translating *corda*.

3 It is not certain what Gratian has done 'to stop the mouths of the faithless'. See McLynn 1994, 101–02, Williams 1995, 155–57. The return of a church sequestered for the benefit of the *Homoians* (*De Spiritu Sancto* 1.1) only happened in 381. To my mind *CTh* 16.5.5 of 3 August 379 is the most likely. Though Williams (and others) have argued plausibly that it was directed against only the Donatists, it is the case that its opening phrase seems to be directed against heretics in general, that it specifies rebaptism as characteristic of the sect attacked, and that this was practised by *Homoians* at Milan (*Ep.* 75a 37), and that it forbids assemblies. And if the law was directed exclusively against the Donatists why are they not named? The law was issued at Milan so that Ambrose cannot but have been aware of it. He may well have thought that the law could be used to 'stop the mouths of the faithless' at Milan.

4 Which made the letter very personal, cf. Ambrose's own practice *Ep. ex.* 11.14.

5 Gen. 18.7.

6 Mt. 25.40.

4. But is it only the humility of yours that I am praising, sublime as it is being practised by the emperor, and not also, and even more, the faith which you have expressed with a mind truly aware of its own worth, because your instructor is **he whom you do not deny**?¹ For who else could have taught you not to impute to him **the created nature which you find in yourself**? It could not have been said more rightly,² nor more clearly. For to describe Christ as created is a contemptuous imputation, not a reverent confession. After all what could be more arrogant than to think him to be the same as ourselves? You have therefore taught me, from whom you claim you wish to learn. I have neither read, nor heard anything that put it so well.

5. Besides, how pious and how admirable is that phrase of yours, that you **do not fear jealousy on the part of God**.³ You expect to be rewarded by the Father for your love of the Son, and you acknowledge that **you cannot add anything to the Son by praising him**, but that **you wish to commend yourself to the Father by praising the Son**. This you were surely taught by no other than him who said: *He who loves me, will be loved by the Father*.⁴

6. You have added to these words, that you being **weak and frail, do not consider yourself a eulogist capable of exalting His divinity by your words**, but that **you will proclaim him to the extent of your capacity, not of his divinity**. Weakness of this kind is powerful in Christ, as the apostle said: *When I am weak then am I strong*.⁵ This kind of humility banishes frailty.

7. I will certainly come,⁶ and I will hurry as you order, so as to be **present**⁷ to hear these words, to be **present** to take them in, just as they fall from your lips. But I have sent⁸ two little volumes. Concerning these I fear no

1 Here and subsequently words printed in bold are repeated from Gratian's letter to Ambrose.

2 *Moralis*, i.e. 'in accordance with tradition'?

3 Again citing from Gratian's letter.

4 Jn 14.21.

5 2 Cor. 12.10.

6 Gratian in his letter had asked Ambrose to come. Ambrose diplomatically accepts the invitation. But does this mean that he was really thinking of leaving Milan to visit the emperor at Trier? Surely not. Otherwise he would have taken the books himself.

7 *Praesens*, repeating the word from Gratian's letter

8 The perfect does not mean that the volumes were sent earlier than the letter, cf. McLynn 1994, 118, 147.

danger, as they have already been approved by your Clemency.¹ As for the composition on the Holy Spirit, I must for time being beg your pardon, for I am aware what a judge I am going to have for my treatise.²

8. Meanwhile your abundant belief and faith in our Lord and Saviour, derived from the son of God, overflows into a fertile declaration³ that we are also to believe in the eternal divinity of the Holy Spirit, implying that you also do **not to impute to him the created nature which you see in yourself**, and that you do not think that God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ 'is jealous of his own Holy Spirit'. For anything that does not share in created nature is divine.⁴

9. If the Lord wills it, I will also comply with this wish of your Clemency, so that you see clearly that He whose grace you have received, and who evidently is pre-eminent in the glory of God, must be honoured under his own name.

10. O august Lord, selected by heavenly judgement, most glorious of princes, may almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, keep you most happy and prosperous to an advanced age, and stoop to establish your kingdom in true glory and everlasting peace.

1 Gratian had asked 'give me the same treatise as you had given me', that is part of what became Ambrose's *De fide*. The two little volumes evidently are the first two books of that work. In addition Gratian had asked for a demonstration that the Holy Spirit was God. Ambrose apologises for not sending it, making the excuse that he fears Gratian's criticism, and therefore (by implication) is taking extra care and time.

2 He has evidently not yet finished it. In c. 9 he promises that he will provide it. He presented Gratian with his treatise on the Holy Spirit in spring 381 (McLynn 1994, 120)

3 *Deprompta...redundant...uberrimam* seems to be a metaphor, which is difficult to translate, comparing Gratian's faith to a river of fertilising water.

4 Gratian has asked Ambrose to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is God. Ambrose deduces – or at least claims to deduce – that Gratian intends the phrases he has used to describe the relationship of God and Christ also apply to that of God and the Holy Spirit.

LETTER ON THE DATE OF EASTER

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 13 (MAUR. 23): AMBROSE TO THE BISHOPS OF AEMILIA (386)

Introduction

The Christian Passover (Pascha or Pasch) celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. Its date is tied to that of the Jewish Passover which Jesus kept on the day before the crucifixion and which the Old Testament set on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Nissan. This meant the fourteenth day after the first appearance of the crescent of the new moon in the evening sky in the first month of the Jewish calendar, which is the first month after the vernal equinox. It was also the full moon. This is what Ambrose means when he talks about 'the fourteenth moon of the first month'. According to the New Testament the day of the Resurrection was the second day after the Crucifixion and the third day after Jesus's celebration of the Last Supper, the Jewish Passover. In the fourth century, Good Friday was not yet a full festival as such, though it was becoming one, 'the Passover of the Passion', and for Ambrose this was the Christian celebration of the fourteenth moon,¹ and it and the following Saturday, were fast days.

The Problems²

At the Council of Nicaea it was laid down that the Christian Passover, the Day of the Resurrection, must always fall on a Sunday, normally on the Sunday of the week which included the fourteenth moon, which was the first full moon in spring, the fourteenth day after the equinox. However, since the

1 c. 11: 'we do not observe the celebration of the fourteenth day of the moon on the day of the Resurrection, but on the day of the Passion, or at least on one of the days preceding the Resurrection'.

2 On the chronological problem see M. Zelzer, 'Zum Osterfestbrief des hl. Ambrosius, und zur römischen Osterberechnung des 4. Jahrhunderts', *Wiener Studien* 91 (1978), 187–204.

'fourteenth moon of the first month' is defined by the lunar cycle, and therefore independent of the solar calendar adopted by the Romans, the first month of the Jewish year did not correspond to any particular Roman month. Hence its fourteenth day did not coincide with any fixed Roman date, as Easter still does not coincide with any fixed date of our corrected version of the Roman calendar. The equinox, being solar, was fixed. It was therefore assumed for convenience¹ that the first month began with the equinox, so that Easter would have to fall within one month after the equinox.

This would be possible provided the fourteenth moon did not fall on Saturday or a Sunday, because if it did, that would make the celebration of the Resurrection, a day of rejoicing, coincide with the commemoration of either the day of the Passion, or of the day before the Resurrection, in each case a day of fasting. To avoid this absurdity in years when the first full moon in spring fell on a Sunday the Church of Alexandria moved the celebration of the Resurrection and the preceding two days of fast to the end of the following week.

The traditional methods of calculating the day of Easter in the Church of Rome was different from that of the Church of Alexandria. The Church of Alexandria employed a calculation based on a cycle of nineteen years, whereas the Church of Rome used one based on an eighty-four-year cycle. Moreover, the Churches had different dates for the equinox and therefore different dates for the end of the first month within which Easter should fall.² It would appear that already in the fourth century the Roman Church normally adopted the Alexandrian practice. But for the year 387, which was a year in which the fourteenth moon fell on a Sunday, it would seem that Pope Siricius refused to adopt the Alexandrian date, which fell outside the latest possible date of Easter by the Roman tradition, though it is not clear which of three dates made possible by the Roman calculation he was proposing to adopt. For whatever reason, Ambrose who as a rule worked in close cooperation with Rome, rejected the Roman date for the Easter of 387, and wrote this letter to the bishops of the north Italian province of Aemilia, in which he argues in favour of the Alexandrian date, as will be seen, taking much of his argument from a work on the date of Easter written by the contemporary patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus.

1 c. 16: 'according to the custom of learned men'.

2 According to the Roman tradition the equinox was on 25 March, and the latest possible date for Easter was thought to be 21 April; at Alexandria the corresponding dates were 22 March and 25 April.

To answer the objection that the celebration of Easter in 387 falls on 25 April, and therefore not within the first month after the equinox, Ambrose points out earlier occasions of Easter having been celebrated at Rome in the week after that of the fourteenth moon following the practice of Alexandria. He cannot deny of course that in 387, the year at issue, the Alexandrian procedure will produce a date for the Christian Passover, the day of the Resurrection, which is outside the first month, but he insists that the fourteenth moon will still fall on 18 April, and therefore within the first month, and that this is the date which really matters, because it is the one specified in the Bible.¹

The genuineness and purpose of the letter

Krusch and Schwartz had argued that the letter was a forgery written many years after Ambrose's death.² Zelzer has refuted their arguments and has shown that our letter was indeed written by Ambrose, and that Ambrose's recommendation and the arguments he uses to support it are mainly derived from the Easter Tables of Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria (385–412),³ a work of which only the dedication to the emperor Theodosius I and the prologue have been preserved.⁴ In other words, in *Ep. ex. 13* Ambrose is doing what he has done in many other letters: he is communicating something that he has learnt by reading Greek authors. McLynn points out that letter is evidently not binding advice, nor even perhaps a response to a plea for advice.⁵ That is surely right. The style of the letter is neither authoritative, nor crystal clear, nor polemical. It is a sermon, more than an order. The opening 'in answer' formula might well be purely literary, as it is in many letters. Certainly Ambrose does not indicate the circumstances in which he was consulted. It is conceivable that he wrote the piece as much as a literary exercise, as to get that particular date adopted.

But it is surely in some way significant that the date proposed by Ambrose differs from that which was adopted by Pope Siricius. Since Nicaea, Rome had normally accepted the Alexandrian date, but seems not have done so in

1 c. 16: *quae quaeritur*.

2 B. Krusch, *Der 84jährige Ostercyclus und seine Quellen. Studien zur christlich mittelalterlichen Chronologie*, Leipzig 1880; E. Schwartz, *Christliche und jüdische Ostertafeln*, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. Kl., N. F. VIII. 6, Berlin 1905, 54ff.

3 Zelzer 1978, 189–96; also in *CSEL* 82.10.3, cxviii–cxx.

4 Text in Krusch 1880, 220ff.

5 McLynn 1994, 281.

387, though it remains uncertain which of three possible dates produced by the Roman method of calculation was actually chosen in that year.¹ The fact that Ambrose is deliberately arguing for a date differing from that favoured by Rome could mean that the letter is more than an exercise.

McLynn points out that Ambrose is taking upon himself the role of the bishops of Alexandria, and especially the recent example of Theophilus, who regularly sent out letters announcing the date of Easter.² He also thinks that at the time when he wrote the letter, that is, soon after the 386/7 crisis in Milan, Ambrose needed to consolidate his ties to colleagues in the Italian episcopate.³ Milan does not appear to have had metropolitan rights over bishops of the imperial province of Aemilia before the episcopacy of Ambrose. Ambrose gradually built up his influence and jurisdiction over neighbouring sees using all means at his disposal. This letter of 386, informing the bishops of the province of the date for the celebration of Easter in 387, could be part of the process.⁴ But would he have strengthened his regional authority by stressing his difference from Rome? Was telling bishops what to do the best way to win their friendship and support? Perhaps McLynn is taking the letter too politically. Is it not rather like so many other letters, a vehicle for publishing his recent Greek reading to sympathetic colleagues, who could not read Greek, but who would be interested, and who would appreciate Ambrose's playful use of allegorical interpretation, which is after all not so different from the way educated Roman had for generations cited Virgil to each other?

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 13

Ambrose to the lords, most beloved brethren, the bishops in the province of Aemilia.

1. That to fix the date of the celebration of Passover⁵ requires not a little wisdom we are taught by Holy Scripture as well as by the tradition of our fathers.⁶ The fathers assembled at the Council of Nicaea as well as issuing those true and admirable decrees concerning the Faith, also drew up a plan

1 Zelzer 1978, 188 n. 5.

2 Ambrose's letter is based on a work of the patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria in which he calculates the dates of Easter for a hundred years from 380, see Zelzer 1978, 192–94.

3 McLynn 1994, 280–81.

4 See Humphries 1999, 147–53.

5 *Celebritatis paschalis*, that is Easter.

6 *Mos maiorum* the traditional Roman legitimation for custom and behaviour.

for the holding of the above-mentioned celebration for nineteen years with the help of some individuals highly skilled in the calculation, and as it were established a rota which would serve as a pattern for other years afterwards. Those adhering to this called the cycle 'the nineteen years cycle', because we ought not to remain in wavering uncertainty by some unfounded conjecture about the celebration, but with the correct calculation known, the attitudes of all would be in agreement, so that the sacrifice for the resurrection of the Lord would be offered on the same night everywhere.

2. My lords, most beloved brethren, in this matter it is so wrong for us to deviate from the truth, and to hold different views with our minds undecided, that a definite requirement has actually been imposed on all Christians in relation to this celebration, seeing that that the Lord himself chose that day to celebrate the Passover, which agrees with the calculation of the correct observance. The scripture says: *Then came the day on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, and he sent Peter and John saying: 'Go, and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it'. But they said to him: 'Where will you have us prepare it?' And he said to them: 'Behold when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house which he enters, and tell the householder: 'The teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished. There make ready.'*²

3. So we learn that in order to celebrate the Passover of the Lord we ought not to descend to ground level, but to look for a large upper room and a furnished one;³ and we ought as it were to wash our senses with spiritual water drawn from the eternal fountain, and to keep to a measure⁴ appropriate to devout observance, and not follow the vulgar practice of searching for certain days according to the phase of the moon, as the apostle says; *You*

¹ *Paterfamilias*.

² Lk. 22.7–12.

³ *Stratum*.

⁴ *Mensura*: as I understand it, Ambrose is arguing that for the Church, as opposed to the pagans, performing the ceremony on the right day is not as important as performing it in the right spirit. He therefore proceeds to interpret the requirement to celebrate on the first full moon in Spring allegorically, citing biblical passages to support his argument. In order to celebrate Easter properly the Church must be both 'complete/perfect' in works and bright in faith, like the full moon. I found the following very difficult to translate, because it needed English words which would make sense both in the literal and the allegorical meaning.

*observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid I have laboured over you in vain.*¹ For this is the beginning of a relapse.²

4. But it is one thing to act like the pagans, to watch what you should undertake on what day of the moon, for example that the fifth day is to be avoided³ and no task begun on that day, or to recommend various positions of the moon for starting transactions, or to beware of certain days as many are in the habit of steering clear of the so-called 'following days'⁴ or the 'Egyptian days'.⁵ It is another thing to focus the watchfulness of a devout mind on that day about which it is written: *This is the day which the Lord has made*.⁶ For although it is written that the Passover of the Lord ought to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first⁷ month, and though we are indeed under an obligation to find out which is the fourteenth moon⁸ in order to celebrate the events of the Lord's passion, we can understand from this verse that what is required for a celebration of this kind is both the perfection of the Church and the fullness of radiant faith, as the prophet, speaking of the Son of God said that *his throne is as the sun in my sight, and as the perfect [i.e. full] moon, it shall remain for ever*.⁹

5. That is why our Lord himself also, when he had performed his wonderful works on earth, as if to say that faith was now well established in human minds, observed that now was the time for His passion, saying: *Father, the hour is come, glorify thy son that the Son may also glorify thee*.¹⁰ For he teaches elsewhere that he sought this glory of celebrating his passion, where he says: *Go and tell that fox, behold I cast out devils today, and I make my healing perfect*¹¹ tomorrow, and the third day I am made perfect.¹² Jesus

1 Gal. 4.10.

2 *Nam incipit esse contrarium*.

3 Virg. *Georg.* 1.277: *quintam fuge*. The fifth day of the month is said to be the birthday of the furies.

4 The fifth day after the Kalends, Nones and Ides, cf. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 5.17.

5 3 April, 21 May, 3 September, 19 October; cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 963.3ff.

6 Ps. 118.24 (Vulg. 117.24).

7 Num. 9.3. Vulg. has 'this month', as has RSV.

8 I.e. the fourteenth rising of the moon, the fourteenth day of the lunar month, the full moon. This was of course not the same as the fourteenth of any particular month in the Roman calendar, which was not lunar but solar.

9 Ps. 88.38 (Vulg. 87.38).

10 Jn. 17.1.

11 *Sanitates perficio*, where Ambrose understands *sanitates* to mean salvation as well as health.

12 *Consummor*: Lk. 13.32: 'I finish my course', in RSV 'I am made perfect', is the meaning relevant to Ambrose's argument here in which Christ sets an example for the Church.

is indeed made perfect, for the benefit of those about to be made perfect, that they may come to believe through their faith in the fullness of his divinity and of his redemption.

6. And so we are looking for both the day and the hour, as the Scriptures teach us. The prophet David says too: *It is time, Lord to act*,¹ when asking for understanding so as to recognise the testimonies of the Lord. The preacher says: *For every thing there is a season*.² Jeremiah exclaims: *The turtle and the swallow and the sparrows of the field observe the time of their coming*.³ And what could be more obvious than that the prophet was referring to the passion of the Lord when he said: *The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib*.⁴ Let us then acknowledge this crib of our master, wherein we are nourished, fed and refreshed.

7. We must therefore especially find out that time at which over the entire world the harmonious prayer of the sacred night is to go out, for prayers too are commended at their proper season, as it is written: *At an acceptable time have I heard you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you*.⁵ This is the time of which the apostle said: *Behold now is the acceptable time, now the day of salvation*.⁶

8. For this reason, seeing that even after the calculations of the Egyptians, and the definition of the Church of Alexandria and also of the bishop of the Roman Church,⁷ several bishops are still awaiting my opinion by letter, it was necessary for me to write what I think about the correct day of Passover. For even though the question has arisen in connection with the coming Passover day, we are publishing what seems the right practice for all time to come, in case any question of this kind should ever be raised.

9. Two things must be observed in the celebration of Passover, the fourteenth day of the moon and the first month, which is named after the new crops. So in order that we should not seem to depart from the Old Testament, let us go through the chapter about the date of the celebration of Passover. Moses too, speaking to the people, advises that the month of the new crops is to be kept, proclaiming that it was the first month: *This month shall be for you the begin-*

1 Ps. 119.126 (Vulg. 118.126).

2 Ec. 3.1.

3 Jer. 8.7.

4 Is. 8.7.

5 Is. 1.3.

6 Is. 49.8.

7 Ambrose is in fact arguing against the Roman and in favour of the Alexandrian practice.

ning of months, the first among the months of the year,¹ and you shall perform the Passover to the Lord your God on the fourteenth day of the first month.²

10. *For the Law was given through Moses; but Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.³* Therefore He who spoke the Law, afterwards coming by the Virgin, at the very end of time, made complete the Law in its entirety, because he came not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it,⁴ and he celebrated the Passover in the week in which the fourteenth day of the moon fell on the fifth day of the week. In fact on that same day as the cited passages teach, he ate the Passover together with his disciples, but on the following day, that is the sixth day of the week, on the fifteenth day of the moon, he was crucified. But as the sixteenth day of the moon fell on the Great Sabbath, it was on the seventeenth day of the moon that he rose from the dead.

11. It follows that for the Passover we must keep this law: that we do not observe the celebration of the fourteenth day of the moon on the day of the Resurrection,⁵ but rather on the day of the Passion, or at least on one of the days immediately preceding the Resurrection,⁶ because the festival of the Resurrection is celebrated on the Lord's Day, and we cannot fast on the Lord's Day, as we rightly condemn the Manichaeans for fasting on that day. For if anybody issues a law of fasting on the day of the Resurrection, that signals disbelief in the resurrection of Christ, since the law says that the Passover is to be eaten with bitterness,⁷ that is to say with grief that the author of Salvation has been slain through so great an act of human sacrilege. But the Day of the Lord should be one of rejoicing, as the prophet teaches, saying: *This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.⁸*

¹ Ex. 12.2.

² Num. 28.16, also Num. 9.3.

³ Jn 1.17.

⁴ Mt. 5.17

⁵ 'The celebration of the fourteenth', i.e. that of the crucifixion, now commemorated on Good Friday, must not be held on a Sunday, which always celebrates the resurrection.

⁶ Wood and Walford, 1881 translate 'or at least one of the next preceding days'. I take this to mean that though we cannot make sure that the celebration of the fourteenth moon, that is the commemoration of the passion, will be held on the actual day of the passion, we can and ought to commemorate it on at least one of the days immediately preceding the day of the resurrection. Ambrose's recommendation suggests that in the celebration of Easter, differentiation of Good Friday and Easter Sunday was still uncertain. It still did not go without saying that crucifixion and resurrection would be commemorated on separate days, or that the passion would be commemorated on the Friday.

⁷ Ex. 12.8.

⁸ Ps. 118.24 (Vulg. 117.24).

12. Therefore we ought to observe not only the day of the Passion, but also that of the Resurrection, so that we have a day of bitterness and one of happiness; on the one we are to fast, on the other to be refreshed. Therefore if it should happen, as it is about to happen,¹ that the fourteenth day of the moon of the first month falls on the Lord's Day, as we ought neither to fast on the Lord's Day, nor to break our fast when the thirteenth day of the moon occurs on the Sabbath,² since it is most important that a fast is observed on the day of the Passion, the celebration of the Passover is to be postponed into the following week. For if the fifteenth moon on which Christ suffered follows on (immediately) and is the second day of the week, the sixteenth moon on which our Lord's flesh rested in the tomb will be third day of the week, while the seventeenth moon on which the Lord rose again would be the fourth day.

13. Provided therefore these three sacred days are celebrated together at the end of the week, the three days within which He suffered, and rested and rose again, the three days of which He said: *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*,³ what need to be troubled by uncertainty?⁴ For if the thought troubles us that we are not celebrating the actual date, whether that of the Passion or that of the Resurrection, we must bear in mind that the Lord himself did not suffer on the fourteenth moon, but on the fifteenth, and that he rose on the seventeenth.⁵ But if your worry is that we are passing over the fourteenth moon, which coincides with a Lord's day, that is 18 April, and are urging you to begin the celebration on the following Lord's Day,⁶ the authority for this is as follows.

14. It was not long ago,⁷ when the fourteenth moon of the first month happened to coincide with the Lord's Day, that the festival was celebrated on the following Lord's Day. For in the eighty-ninth year of the era of Diocletian,⁸

1 In 387.

2 On the question of whether to fast or not on ordinary Saturdays Ambrose is reported to have said: 'When I am at Rome I fast, when I am here [i.e. at Milan] I do not' (Aug. *Ep.* 54.3).

3 Jn 2.19.

4 If the fourteenth moon falls on a Sunday, the holy days will run into the following week (last sentence of c. 12). It will be in order to celebrate them in that week, provided they are celebrated at the end of the week, with the celebration of the resurrection on the Sunday. It would not do to celebrate them Monday to Wednesday.

5 While Christians generally kept their Passover, i.e. the commemoration of the crucifixion, on the 'fourteenth moon' in accordance with the Old Testament's prescription for the Jewish Passover, the fourteenth moon was actually the day of the Last Supper and not of the crucifixion.

6 25 April.

7 In 373 and 377.

8 AD 373.

when the fourteenth moon fell on 24 March, Passover was kept by us on the last day of March. The Alexandrians too and the Egyptians, according to their own writings, when the fourteenth moon coincided with the twenty-eighth day of the Phamenoth, celebrated Passover on the fifth day of the month Pharmuthi, which is the last day of March, and they therefore agreed with us. Again in the ninety-third year of the era of Diocletian when the fourteenth moon coincided with the fourteenth day of the month of Pharmuthi,¹ which is 9 April, which was a Lord's Day, the Passover was celebrated on Sunday the twenty-first Pharmuthi, which by our reckoning was 16 April. It follows that since we have both reason and precedent on our side there is nothing that ought to worry us in this procedure.²

15. Now here we have a problem that it seems we must disentangle, namely that some people think that we propose to celebrate the Passover in the second month after the end of the month of the new fruit, even though it is written: *keep the first month, the month of the new fruit*.³ In fact it is impossible that anybody celebrates the Passover beyond the month of the new fruit unless they keep the fourteenth moon so strictly according to the letter that they never celebrate Passover on any date other than that.⁴ Now the Jews are going to celebrate the coming Passover in the twelfth month and not in the first, that is on 20 March according to us, but according to the Egyptians on the 24th day of the month Phamenoth, which is not the first month but the twelfth. For it begins on 25 February and ends on 26 March, while the first, the Pharmuthi, begins on 27 March and ends on 25 April. According to the Egyptian reckoning, we are therefore going to celebrate the Lord's Passover in the first month, namely on 25 April, which is the thirtieth of Pharmuthi.

16. Nor do I consider it absurd that in choosing the month for the celebration we accept a precedent from the country where the Passover was first celebrated. That is why our ancestors in the acts of the Council of Nicaea thought fit to decree what, if you examine it carefully, is the same cycle of nineteen years, and correctly reserved for celebration the actual month of new fruit, because in Egypt the new corn is cut in the first month. But this month is the first according to the crops of the Egyptians, and the first

1 AD 377.

2 Ambrose has supported his recommendation that if the fourteenth day of the first month falls on a Sunday the three holy days are to be celebrated on the last three days of following week first by argument, then by citing precedents.

3 Deut. 16.1.

4 I.e. unless they postpone the celebration not by a week, but until the fourteenth of the next month.

according to the Law, and the eighth according to our custom. For the indication¹ begins in the month of September. The first of April therefore is in the eighth month. The month begins, however, not as is common usage,² but according to the practice of the learned men, that is at the equinox, that is 21 March, and it finishes on 21 April. The days of the Passover have therefore been celebrated most often within these thirty-one days.³

17. But as six years ago we celebrated the Sunday of Passover on 21 April, that is on the thirtieth day of the month, at least according to our reckoning, we ought not be troubled if next year we are going to celebrate the Sunday of Passover on the thirtieth of Pharmuthi.⁴ However, if anybody thinks this to be the second month, because the Passover will be three days after the completion of a month which seems to end on 21 April, let him bear in mind that the fourteenth moon, which is the date that counts, falls on 18 April and so within the prescribed month: for the law demands that the day of the passion should be celebrated within the first month, the month of new fruits.

18. We therefore satisfy the law with regard to the full moon, in that three more days remain until the completion of the month. It⁵ does not therefore fall into the second month, since the Passover will be kept within the same month, namely the first. It is not, however, right that we should be tied to the letter. Granted that we ought to be instructed by the traditional manner of celebrating the Passover, nevertheless the apostle himself also teaches us when he says: *Our Passover is Christ sacrificed*.⁶ And also the reading cited earlier⁷ also teaches us that the letter is not to be followed; for there you have: *And you will hold the Passover for your God on the fourteenth day of the first month*. He says 'day' and not 'moon'. On the basis of this passage the most skilled (experts) have calculated the month, as prescribed by the law, by the cycle of the moon; and therefore, since according to very many (experts) (this particular) cycle of the moon starts on the

1 *Indiction*: the date of the publication of the taxes to be levied that year, and therefore the beginning of the tax year. The civil year began on 1 January.

2 I.e. for the Easter calculation the 'first month' is not the first month in spring according to the Julian calendar, i.e. April, but a month counted from the spring equinox.

3 Correctly thirty-two days.

4 I.e. 25 April.

5 Because the eighteenth is three days before the twenty-first.

6 1 Cor. 5.7.

7 *Proposita lectio*: Num. 9.3

nones,¹ you see that the nones of May² can still be counted as part of the first month of the first fruit. Therefore also according to the verdict of the Law this is the first month. Finally, the Greeks call a month 'moon',³ and therefore in Greek months are 'moons'. And therefore the ordinary usage of foreign peoples employs 'moon' in the sense of 'days'.

19. But even successive passages of the Old Testament show that we must celebrate the day of the Passion on one day and the day of the Resurrection on another, for this is what you read: *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats; and you shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it among themselves, and at night they shall eat that flesh roasted in fire.*⁴ And further on: *And you shall eat it in anxiety.*⁵ *It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and on all the lands*⁶ *of Egypt I will execute judgement. I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood I will protect*⁷ *you, and the plague of extermination shall not fall upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt. This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe the feast-day as an ordinance for ever.*⁸

20. We notice that the day of the Passion is described as a fast, because the lamb is to be killed towards evening; and even though in accordance with John who said: *Children, it is the last hour,*⁹ we may understand

1 In 387 the first full moon in spring fell on 18 April. Calculating the month by the cycle of the moon will therefore have started the month with the new moon on 5 April, i.e. the nones of April. It follows that 25 April, the date Ambrose has recommended for the celebration of Easter Sunday, is still within the first month. But this does not explain how the nones of May (i.e. 7 May) can still be in the first month. Could something be wrong with the text at this point? See the following note.

2 Could it be that Ambrose wrote: nine days before the Kalends of May (*nonum Kalendas Maias*) as in c.21, i.e. 23 April?

3 μήνη.

4 Ex. 12.5-8.

5 *Cum solitudine*, Vulgate: *festinantes*, hastening, as has the RSV.

6 Vulgate has 'on all the gods of Egypt'.

7 Vulgate: *transibo*, 'I will pass over'.

8 Ex. 12.11-14.

9 1 Jn 2.18.

'towards evening' to mean 'the end of days', yet even if we interpret the passage allegorically,¹ it is clear that the lamb was killed in the evening of that day, when the shadows of night have already fallen; and that the fast is to be offered on that day is true, because in this way 'you will eat it with anxiety', for anxiety clings to those who are fasting.² But there is a meal of rejoicing, with the happiness of renewal, on the day of the Resurrection, the day on which the people is seen to have departed from Egypt, after the slaying of the first-born of the Egyptians. The sequel shows this more clearly, about which Scripture says that after the Jews kept the Passover as Moses had instructed: *it was around midnight and the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt down from the first-born of Pharaoh. And Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said to them: 'Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the children of Israel, and go, serve the Lord, your God And the Egyptians impatiently put pressure on the people, to send them out of the land with all possible speed'*.³ Thereupon the Israelites departed in such a hurry that they did not have the opportunity to leaven their dough: *For the Egyptians had expelled them, and they were unable to delay, and they had not made any preparations for their journey*.⁴

21. We have therefore shown that the day of Resurrection is to be observed after the day of the Passion, and that the day of the Resurrection ought not to be on the fourteenth day of the moon, but later as the Old Testament says, because the day of the resurrection is the day when the people departing from Egypt were baptised in the sea and in the cloud, and overcame death, as the apostle says, receiving spiritual bread, and drawing spiritual drink from the rock;⁵ and that the Passion of the Lord cannot be observed on the Lord's day, and that if the fourteenth day of the moon falls on a Sunday, another week is to be added, as was done in the seventy-sixth year of the era of Diocletian,⁶ for then we celebrated the Sunday of the Passover on the twenty-eighth day of the month of Pharmuthi, which is 23 April,⁷ without any hesitation on the part of our ancestors. The course of the moon and reason concur in recommending that the coming Passover should

1 Literally 'according to the mystery', *iuxta mysterium*.

2 Ambrose deduces that the Passover of the Passion is a fast from the fact that the Passover lamb was killed and eaten after nightfall, that is after the fourteenth day.

3 Ex. 12.29–33 with omissions.

4 Ex. 12.39.

5 1 Cor. 10.2–4.

6 AD 360.

7 *nonum Kalendas Maías*.

LETTER ON THE DATE OF EASTER

291

be celebrated on the twenty-first moon, because it can be postponed as late as the twenty-first day of the moon in accordance with custom.

22. Since therefore so many truthful testimonies are in agreement, let us celebrate the feast of our common salvation with happiness and rejoicing according to the precedent set by our ancestors, colouring our doorposts¹ with faith in the passion of our Lord, posts which frame the doorway of speech, that doorway which the apostle prayed might be opened for himself,² with faith in the passion of our Lord. It was also concerning this door that David said: *Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, and a door to the circle of my lips*,³ so that we may speak of nothing but the blood of Christ, through which we have conquered death, by which we have been redeemed. May the incense of Christ burn in us!⁴ To him let us listen! At him let us direct the eyes of mind and body, wondering at his works, declaring his bounty! And over the threshold of our door may the acknowledgement⁵ of our sacred redemption shine in splendour. Let us therefore with fervent spirit take up the holy rite *with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*,⁶ singing in harmony according to the pious teaching the glory of the Father and the Son and the undivided majesty of the Spirit.

1 See Ex. 12.7 cited above, but also Deut. 11.20: 'and you shall write them on the door posts of your house'.

2 Col. 4.3: 'that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ'.

3 Ps. 141.3 (Vulg. 140.3).

4 Cf. 2 Cor. 2.15: 'For we are the aroma of Christ to God'.

5 *Confessio*.

6 1 Cor. 5.8.

ASCETICISM AND DISSENSION AT VERCELLI AND THE AFFAIR OF JOVINIANUS

EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 14 (MAUR. 63)

Introduction

This very long letter was written in 396. Bishop Limenius of Vercelli had died, and because of dissensions in the Church no successor had yet been appointed.¹ The basic theme is a call to all associated with the election to set aside disagreements and to elect a worthy bishop.

A second theme takes up a very large proportion of the letter.² Two monks had come from Milan to Vercelli to propagate the teaching of Jovinianus³ which denied the religious value of ascetic living and the privileged status of virginity. This teaching represented a strong, but in the long run unsuccessful reaction against the ascetic movement which was exercising an enormous influence in Church and society at the time, and would continue to do so for centuries.

Something needs to be said about this situation. Asceticism was not new to Christianity – or to paganism – in the fourth century; what was new was a more extreme form of ‘eastern’ asceticism, which its exponents thought of as being modelled on the practices of the famous Desert Fathers of Egypt. The best-known members of leading senatorial families who adopted this form of asceticism in Rome were the women who became the correspondents and companions of Jerome.⁴ The style of life they adopted scandalised both pagans and more traditionally minded Christians in Rome. It involved withdrawal from normal society, at this time usually into their own great houses; neglect of personal appearance and care; prolonged fasting with vigils for

1 On the election see R. Lizzi, *Vescovi e strutture ecclesiastiche nella città tardoantica (L'Italia Annonaria nell VI-V secolo)*, Como 1989, 46–50.

2 Cc. 7–43

3 On Jovinianus see J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome*, London 1975, 180–87; and D. G. Hunter, ‘Resistance to the virginal ideal in late fourth century Rome’, *Theological Studies* 48 (1987), 45–64.

4 Kelly 1975.

prayer; and intensive study of the Bible and religious writings. Most of all, they stressed chastity, and the importance of training out of themselves all vestiges of sexuality. They saw themselves, literally, as 'brides of Christ'. On the basis of their extreme ascetic regime they also saw themselves as living the most authentic and most meritorious form of Christian life.¹

Jerome was not the founder of this approach, but he did publicise it and assisted its rapid development after his arrival in Rome in 382. More traditional Christians looked askance on the activities of Jerome and his coterie. Some bishops were quite justifiably alarmed at the potential for the disruption of established communities represented by the ascetics. In addition to all the social prestige of an aristocratic background, these men and women could appear as rival claimants to authority on the strength of their 'more perfect' way of life. The Church had only recently rejected claims to Christian 'perfection' in a series of dualist heresies,² and to some the claims of the new-style ascetics may well have appeared very similar.³

In 383, the opposition to extreme asceticism had found a spokesman in a layman named Helvidius. We know the contents of the tract he wrote only from Jerome's refutation of it in his *Contra Helvidium*.⁴ Utilising well-known gospel texts Helvidius put forward the view that, though Mary had been a virgin at the time of conceiving Jesus, after his birth she lived a normal married life with Joseph and had several other children with him.

This was an attack on the claims of the ascetics to a superior state of salvation. For the upholders of asceticism, Ambrose among them,⁵ had begun to place emphasis on Mary's virginity, and even to argue for her having always remained a virgin. This view buttressed the claims they made in favour of celibacy and of the higher merit it brought.

After Jerome's refutation we hear no more of Helvidius. But his criticism of asceticism was taken up by Jovinianus, a Roman monk who after living a life of extreme asceticism decided that such mortification had nothing to

1 E. A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith*, Lewiston NY 1986; E. A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, Lewiston NY 1984; Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1993.

2 H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila, the Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church*, Oxford 1976.

3 Ambrose in fact claims that Jovinian regarded not just ascetics but even all Nicenes as Manichaeans. See *Ep. ex.* 15.12–13.

4 Kelly 1975, 104–07.

5 See Introduction to *Ep.* 71 and the letter itself about the case of Bonosus who held views close to those of Helvidius and Jovinianus, above pp. 58–60.

do with true Christianity. He remained a monk, but around 390 published a theological treatise justifying the view that faith and baptism were what secured salvation, and that there was no hierarchy of worth beyond being baptised.¹

This won followers, but also aroused violent opposition. In 392 or, more likely, 393 Pope Siricius informed Ambrose that he had excommunicated Jovinianus,² whereupon Ambrose assembled a council of north Italian bishops who proceeded to add their sentence of excommunication to that of the pope.³ But, as we have seen, in 396 followers of Jovinianus were still spreading his doctrines at Vercelli, and doing so with some success, so that the doctrines would seem to have become an issue in the episcopal election.

It is certainly not a coincidence that the last three letters *extra collectionem* are, in one way or another, directed against the teachings of Jovinianus. This issue remained of great importance. In 401, Augustine composed his two treatises on *The Good of Marriage* (*De bono coniugali*) and *On Holy Virginité* (*De sancta virginitate*)⁴ in part against the Manichaeans, but also against Jovinianus.⁵ Perhaps considerably later the issue still seemed to be of first-rate importance to the anonymous individual who assembled the second group of the *Epistulae extra collectionem*.⁶ The issue had clearly not been decided even then. The ascetic interpretation of Christianity prevailed in the end, but not without a struggle.

The argument of the letter, which is really more a sermon than a letter, is very long and loosely constructed. For more than a third of his treatise Ambrose seems to be so taken up with Jovinianus as to have lost sight of the episcopal election altogether. But this is not the case. When he returns to the election, and enumerates the qualities a man must have in order to be good bishop, he draws attention to the fact that Bishop Eusebius of Vercelli had been the first bishop to combine his office of bishop with the observation of monastic rules, and also to have induced his clergy to observe the ascetic

1 See the letter of Pope Siricius and *Ep. ex. 15* and their respective Introductions, for more on Jovinian and his views.

2 See the letter of Pope Siricius, below pp. 337–39.

3 *Ep. ex. 15*, below pp. 340–45.

4 P. G. Walsh, *Augustine, De bono coniugali*, and *De sancta virginitate*, Latin text, English translation, introduction and notes, Oxford 2001.

5 *Reconsiderations (Retractationes)* 2.27.

6 See above pp. 38–39.

rules with him.¹ Ambrose argues that this is not only a tradition of the see of Vercelli, but a universally valid discipline, and he supports his argument with episodes from the Bible interpreted allegorically, and pointing out that the time spent in the desert by John the Baptist, Elisha and above all Elijah prepared them for their careers as prophets.² One might deduce from this no more than that Ambrose wanted a man with a monastic background to be elected bishop of Vercelli.

But there is more to it than that. The letter is not merely concerned with what kind of man would make a good bishop of Vercelli, but quite generally with what kind of man makes a good bishop; and it is clear that Ambrose thought that the experience of hardship and austerity whether in exile, or in a monastery, was a qualification second to none. Moreover he is not concerned only with potential bishops, but with every rank of clergy. The letter is, in fact, another treatise on the duties of the clergy. But compared with his earlier treatment of the topic³ Ambrose shows himself much less concerned to relate Christian duties to those honoured by Roman tradition and philosophy. There is scarcely any Christian apologetic. One might almost say that Bible-based asceticism has taken the place of philosophy.

And Ambrose is addressing not clergy only. The final part of the letter is directed at the community as a whole. It is an eloquent call to live in accordance with Christian values, concluding with more specific advice to mothers, masters and slaves. While Ambrose cannot and does not expect these people to live as monks, it is clear that he thinks that the demands he makes on them depend on the validity of ascetic values.

Ambrose's intervention in the election of the new bishop of Vercelli was effective. His candidate Honoratus was elected.⁴ But this letter, at least in the form in which we have it, was surely not his main instrument. Could it be that the document in its present form is an elaborated version of a letter or sermon Ambrose composed in connection with the election? *Ep. ex. 14* must be among the latest of the surviving letters of Ambrose, if it is not the latest. It is in a sense his testament.

1 C. 66.

2 Cc. 67–82

3 *De officiis ministrorum*, see Davidson 2002 and the translation by de Romestin, 'Duties of the clergy', in *The Principal Works of St. Ambrose*, NPNF 10.1–89.

4 Lizzi 1989, 46–50.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* 14

Ambrose, the servant of Christ, called bishop, to the Church of Vercelli, and to those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus.

May the grace of God the father and his only-begotten Son be fulfilled for you in the Holy Spirit.

1. I am worn out by grief that the Church of the Lord which is among you still has not got a bishop, and that it alone of all the Churches of Liguria and Aemilia, and of the Venetias, and of all the other neighbouring regions of Italy is without the office, an office which formerly other cities asked to be filled from Vercelli,¹ and what is even more embarrassing, responsibility for the contention among you which is causing the delay is ascribed to me.² For as long as there are dissensions among you how can we make any decision, or you elect anybody, or anyone accept election, or anyone agree to undertake in a divided community the role which is barely manageable in a harmonious one?

2. Is this the instruction you received from your confessor?³ Are these people really the offspring of those righteous fathers, who as soon as they saw the holy Eusebius, who previously had been unknown to them, preferred him to their own countrymen, and elected him as soon as they saw him; and required no more than to see him in order to elect him?⁴ It was right that a man chosen by the whole Church should emerge as so eminent, it was right that he who had been demanded by all should have been believed to have been chosen by the judgement of God. It is fitting therefore that you follow the example of your fathers, especially because being instructed by so holy a confessor, you ought to be better than your fathers, because a better teacher has instructed and educated you, and therefore you ought to give

1 Vercelli had formerly enjoyed some loose form of jurisdiction over a number of Christian communities in eastern Piedmont, but was losing this position to Ambrose's Milan. See Humphries 1999, 145–46.

2 This suggests that some people were blaming Ambrose for the contention, presumably through his intervention in the election.

3 Eusebius of Vercelli defended the Nicene creed at the council of Milan in 355 and was subsequently exiled. See Williams 1995, 52–62. Ambrose returns to the Eusebian tradition of Vercelli in c. 66,

4 Eusebius was not a native of Vercelli. He was a lector in the Church of Rome when he was elected bishop of Vercelli. See Williams 1995, 52. One might deduce from Ambrose's recall of the election of Eusebius that his own candidate was not a native of Vercelli either.

a demonstration of your moderation and accord by reaching unanimous consensus¹ in your demand for a bishop.

3. For truly if according to the Lord's saying *if on earth two agree about everything they ask, it will be done by my Father who is in heaven. For wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*,² how much more will this be the case where there is a full congregation in the name of the Lord, and where the demand of all of them is unanimous; so that we ought not be in any doubt that the Lord Jesus will be there to inspire the decision, to grant the petition, to preside at the ordination and to confer his grace.

4. Therefore make yourselves appear worthy to have Christ in the midst of you. For where there is peace there is Christ, because peace is Christ.³ Where there is justice there is Christ, because Christ is justice.⁴ Let him be in your midst, so that you can see him, so that it may not be said to you: *Among you stands one whom you do not know*.⁵ The Jews did not see the one in whom they did not believe; we perceive him in our devotion, discern him in our faith.

5. Let him therefore stand in the midst of you, so that *the heavens* which *declare the glory of God*⁶ *are opened to you*, so that you do his will and perform his work.⁷ For him who sees Jesus the heavens are opened, as they were opened for Stephen when he said: *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God*.⁸ Jesus was standing there as an advocate; he was standing there concerned to assist Stephen, his athlete,⁹ in the contest; he was standing there ready to crown his martyr.

6. Let him therefore also stand there for you, so that you need not fear him when he is sitting; for when he is sitting he is sitting in judgement, as Daniel says: *Thrones were placed, and books were opened, and one that was ancient of days has taken his seat*.¹⁰ Furthermore it is written in the eighty-first

1 On this ideal see McLynn 1994, 44–52.

2 Mt.18.19–20.

3 Cf. Eph. 2.14.

4 Cf. 1 Cor. 1.30.

5 Jn 1.26.

6 Ps. 19.2 (Vulg.18.2).

7 Cf. Jn 6.27–30.

8 Acts 7.55.

9 Cf. athletic metaphors in 2 Tim. 2.4, 7; 1 Cor. 9.24–27.

10 Dan. 7.9; the phrase 'books were opened' recurs 11 lines later.

psalm:¹ *God has stood up in the congregation of the gods, and standing in their midst he awards preferment among the gods.*² It follows that when God is sitting he judges, when he is standing he awards preferment. And those who have fallen short he judges,³ but among the gods he awards preferment. Let him stand, as your protector, as your *good shepherd*,⁴ so that *dangerous wolves*⁵ may not attack you.

7. It is not without purpose that my admonition has turned aside to this point. For I hear that Sarmatio and Barbatianus⁶ have come to you, men who jabber nonsense, who say that there is no merit in abstinence, that there is no grace in austerity, none in virginity, that all men are valued at the same price, that they are mad who discipline their flesh with fasting in order to bring it into subjection to the mind. If Paul had thought this madness, he would never have done it, he would never have written to instruct others. But he glories in it, saying: *I pummel my body, and reduce it to slavery, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be found a hypocrite.*⁷ So men who do not pummel their body, and wish to preach to others, are considered hypocrites.

8. But is anything as hypocritical as a preaching that stimulates dissipation, corruption and lust, that is an incitement to low pleasures, a fuel of incontinence, a kindling of desire? What new school is this that has produced these Epicureans?⁸ Not a school of philosophers, as they themselves claim, but one of ignorant men who advocate pleasure, persuade to luxury, who consider purity to be useless. *They were with us, but they were not of us;*⁹ for I am

1 Ps. 82.1 (Vulg. 81.1).

2 Wood and Walford, 1881 translate: 'God standeth in the congregation of the princes and decideth among the gods'. Translation of the of the antithesis *iudicat / diiudicat* is difficult. *Diiudicat* must mean he separates some from others. My translation interprets the 'separation' in the sense of choosing for promotion, which is what the bishops selecting a new bishop for Vercelli are finding difficult, so that they need Jesus to stand in their midst to help them.

3 Ps. 139.16 (Vulg. 138.16).

4 Jn 10.11.

5 Acts 20.29.

6 Two monks who had left their monastery at Milan, and begun to preach against the Christian ideal of the ascetic life, probably as followers of Jovinianus, cf. the letter of Siricius (Maur. 41a), and Ambrose's reply *Ep. ex. 15* (Maur. 42).

7 *Reprobis*; RSV translates 1 Cor. 9.27: 'I should be disqualified'.

8 Epicurus (341–270 BC) founded the philosophical school named after him. His purpose was to teach his followers to achieve a happy life. This was distorted by opponents to mean that he advocated a life of pleasure.

9 1 Jn 2.19.

not embarrassed to say what John the Evangelist says. But when they were resident here¹ these people initially learned to fast, they were kept under restraint within the monastery. There was no place for debauchery. They were not allowed the licence² to engage in their ridiculous controversy.

9. This these degenerate men could not stand; they departed. Then, when they wanted to return, they were not allowed back. I had heard numerous things about them, which I needed to guard against. I had admonished them, but to no advantage. And so, boiling with rage, they began to spread such teachings as would make them the wretched instigators of every kind of vice. At any rate they threw away the advantage of having fasted, they threw away the advantage of having once exercised self-restraint. So now with diabolical malice they envy the good deeds of others, the fruits of which they have themselves lost.

10. What virgin could hear it being said that there is no reward for her chastity, and not groan? God forbid that she will easily believe it, at any rate that she will either abandon her zeal, or relax the determination of her mind. What widow when she learns that there is no profit in widowhood would prefer to remain loyal to her marriage and to live her life in sadness rather than to enter a happier life? What woman restrained by the marriage bond, if she should hear that chastity is not held in honour, might not be led into temptation by the heedless frivolity of body and mind? Is it for this that the Church, day after day in its holy readings, in the sermons of its bishops sounds the praise of chastity, the glory of virginity?

11. So it is in vain that the apostle says: *I wrote to you in my letter not to mingle with fornicators*?³ And let them not object: 'we are not talking of all the fornicators in the world, but we are saying that someone who has been baptised in Christ ought no longer be considered a fornicator, but that his life whatever its character has been accepted by God'.⁴ That is why the Apostle added: *Not with the fornicators of this world*, and later, *with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of fornication or greed, or an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with outsiders*?⁵ And to the Ephesians he wrote: *But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is*

1 The monastery at Milan of which Ambrose was in charge.

2 *Licentia*, meaning 'freedom to do as they please', 'dissoluteness'.

3 1 Cor. 5.9.

4 These are of course Ambrose's words put in the mouth of the Jovinians.

5 1 Cor. 5.10–11.

*fitting among saints.*¹ And further on: *Be sure of this: no impure man, or one who is covetous, or unclean (which spells idolatry) has any inheritance in the kingdom of God or of Christ.*² It is quite evident that this was said of the baptised. For they who receive the inheritance, are they who are baptised in the death of Christ, and who are buried with him so as to be resurrected with him. Therefore they are *heirs of God, coheirs of Christ.*³ They are heirs of God because the grace of God is conveyed to them; coheirs of Christ, because they are born again into his life; heirs of Christ too, because the inheritance is given to them as a result of his death, as being the inheritance of the testator's.

12. Those who have something to lose therefore ought to take greater care for themselves than they who have not; they ought to live more carefully, to beware of the temptations to vice, the inducements to sin, which are stimulated most of all by eating and drinking. In short *the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.*⁴

13. Even Epicurus⁵ himself, the man whom these people prefer to follow rather than the apostles, and who advocates pleasure, and denies that pleasure is the vehicle of evil, nevertheless does not deny that out of pleasure may arise certain consequences which generate evils; for he teaches that a life of debauchery, given up to amusements, is not to be judged blameworthy, [but only] if it is not troubled by fear of pain or death.⁶ And how far from the truth he is can be seen even from the fact that he asserts that in the beginning pleasure was created in man by God, as is stated by Philominus,⁷ his disciple, in his *Epitomes*, who also alleges that the view originated among the Stoics.

14. But divine scripture refutes this, and teaches that pleasure was instilled into Adam and Eve by the trickery and seductiveness of the serpent; unless⁸ it could be that pleasure is the serpent itself, and that this is the reason

1 Eph. 5.3.

2 Eph. 5.5.

3 Rom. 8.17.

4 Ex. 32.6 – after the making of the golden calf.

5 Cf. p. 298 n. 8 above.

6 Cf. Epicurus, *Sent.* 10 (translated as *Principal Doctrines* 2 in J. L. Saunders, *Greek Philosophers after Aristotle*, London /New York 1966, 54). Epicurus refuted fear of death by arguing that consciousness is produced by a combination of atoms and cannot survive their disruption at death.

7 No philosopher of this name is known. The Maurist editors suggested that the name is a mistake for Philodemus, some of whose charred writings have survived at Herculaneum.

8 I have translated *siquidem* as if it was *nisi* to account for the subjunctive.

why the passions of pleasure are so various and slippery, and, as it were, infected with a corrupting poison. It is clear therefore that it was because he had been misled by his appetite for pleasure that Adam fell from his obedience to God and the rewards of grace. How then can pleasure recall us to paradise, when it was pleasure alone that deprived us of it?

15. That is why the lord Jesus, wishing to fortify us against the temptations of the Devil, fasted when he was himself about to struggle with him, so that we should know that without fasting we would be unable to overcome the allurements of evil. Therefore the devil hurled the missile of pleasure as the first of his temptations, saying: *If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.*¹ Whereupon the Lord said: *Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God*, and he refused to give the command, when he could have given it, so that through this salutary precept he might teach us to apply ourselves to the love of reading rather than the pursuit of pleasure. And as these people deny the necessity of fasting, let them offer us a reason why Christ fasted, other than that his fast was to be an example for us. That is why, later on, he taught that evil could not easily be conquered without our fasting, saying: *This kind is not expelled except by prayer and fasting.*²

16. And what is the meaning of Scripture when it teaches us that Peter fasted, and was fasting and praying when the mystery of the baptising of the gentiles was revealed to him,³ if it is not to show that even the saints themselves become more impressive by fasting? That is why Moses received the Law when he was fasting.⁴ For that reason Peter too was taught the grace of the New Testament when he was fasting. Daniel also through the merit of fasting shut the jaws of the lions,⁵ and foresaw the events of future ages.⁶ Or how can we achieve salvation unless we have washed away our sins by fasting, when Scripture says: *Fasting and almsgiving liberate from sin?*⁷

17. Who then are these new teachers who reject the merit of fasting? Is not that the speech of pagans saying: *Let us eat and drink,*⁸ men whom the

1 Mt. 4.3ff.

2 Mt. 17.20 in the Vulgate; the verse is not in the RSV.

3 Acts 10.10–16.

4 Deut. 9.9ff.

5 Dan. 6.18ff. King Darius of Persia was the one who fasted.

6 Dan.10.3ff.

7 Tob. 12.9.

8 Is. 22.13.

Apostle rightly ridicules saying: *What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus, if the dead do not rise? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die.*¹ The meaning of this is: What does it profit me to fight even unto death unless I do it in order to redeem my body?² Because it is redeemed in vain, if there is no hope of resurrection. Accordingly, if all hope of redemption is lost, *let us eat and drink*, let us not lose the reward of things present seeing that we have no claim to things future. To indulge in food and drink is therefore appropriate for those who hope for nothing after their death. Therefore the Epicureans, the advocates of pleasure, say that 'death is nothing to us';³ for what is broken down is insensible, and what is insensible is nothing to us.⁴ In this way they prove that they live only in the body, and not in the mind, and that they are not exercising the functions of the soul, but only those of the flesh, seeing that they think that with the separation of the soul and body every vital function is broken down, that the merits of their virtues and all the vigour of their soul perishes, that with the end of bodily sensations they cease completely, and that the soul leaves not a relic behind, even though the body is not decomposed instantly. They therefore insist that the soul is decomposed before the body, though even in accordance with their own opinion they ought to focus their attention on flesh and bones, which do survive after death; However, in accordance with true doctrine they ought not deny the grace of the resurrection.⁵

18. Rightly therefore the Apostle, while refuting these men, advises us not to be overthrown by opinions such as these: *Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good morals. Live sober and just lives and sin no more, for some have no knowledge of God.*⁶ So sobriety is good because drunkenness is sin.

19. What about the notorious Epicurus himself, the advocate of pleasure, whom we so frequently mention either to prove that these people are disciples

1 1 Cor. 15.32.

2 *Hominem meum.*

3 Lucretius 3.830.

4 A close paraphrase of Epicurus, *Sent.* 2, translated as *Principal doctrines* 2, in Saunders 1966, 53.

5 Ambrose claims that the Epicureans only propose the corporeality of the soul, because their life is entirely physical, and they live as if they had no souls. He charges them with inconsistency in that they who insist that sensation depend entirely on the body, ignore the fact that the body does not decompose instantly at death, and thereby something remains which divine grace can restore to life, as is Christian doctrine. Ambrose has not tried to disprove the Epicurean atomic theory by which the soul, like the body, dissolves into its constituent atoms.

6 1 Cor. 15.33.

of the pagans and followers of the Epicurean sect, or to teach that he himself, whom even the philosophers exclude from their fellowship as the patron of degeneracy,¹ is nevertheless preferable to these men? For he shouts, as is asserted by Dimarchus, that 'neither drinking, nor banquets, nor male offspring, nor the embraces of women, nor an abundance of fish and other things of that kind which are prepared for a rich feast, make life delightful, but sober conversation'. He therefore adds that the persons who enjoy the abundance of the banquet in moderation are they who do not covet them immoderately.² He who sincerely enjoys juice and bread or even water despises the delicacies of rich meals, because they are the cause of many troubles.³ Elsewhere Epicureans go as far as to say: 'extravagant meals and drink do not produce an agreeable state of pleasure, but a continent life does'.⁴

20. Seeing that philosophy has repudiated these people, should not the Church exclude them, especially as they frequently contradict themselves with their own assertions, because they have a bad case? For even though it is their basic tenet that they do not believe in any delight of pleasure that is not obtained from food or drink, nevertheless since they realised that they could not maintain so reprehensible a creed without incurring the utmost disgrace, and that they were being deserted by everybody, they chose to adorn it with a colouring of respectable arguments, and so one of them⁵ said: 'while we are seeking after enjoyment through feasting and song, we have lost the enjoyment which is aroused by hearing of the word, through which alone we can be saved'.

21. Putting forward this complicated argumentation these people surely give the impression of being inconsistent and discordant. Scripture condemns them in as much as it does not fail to mention that the Apostle refuted them. For in the Acts of the Apostles Luke, who wrote this book in the style of a history, says: *Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers disputed with him, and some kept saying: 'What would this babbler say'. Others said: 'He would seem to be a preacher of strange demons'.*⁶

1 Cf. Cicero's view: 'With such philosophy we must fight it out "with horse and foot," as the saying is, if our purpose is to defend and maintain our standards of moral rectitude' (*De Officiis* 3.116, trans. W. Miller in Loeb Classical Library edition).

2 Epicurus, *Ep.* 3.130.

3 Epicurus, *fr.* 181.

4 Epicurus, *fr.* 476a.

5 To us unknown.

6 Acts 17.18.

22. Yet the Apostle did not depart from even this group without evidence of grace; in that Dionysius the Aeropagite together with Damali¹ his wife and many others came to believe. So this gathering of the learned and eloquent by setting this precedent proclaimed that they had been defeated by the plain discourse of the believers.

23. What therefore do they mean, these people who try to pervert those whom the Apostle has won, whom Christ has redeemed with his blood? What do they mean when they state that those who have been baptised need not exert themselves to train their virtues, that neither revelling, nor an excess of pleasures can harm them, that those who do without such things are foolish, that virgins ought to marry and make sons, and in the same spirit, that widows who have once unhappily experienced marital intercourse, are to experience it a second time, that even if they are able to contain themselves they are wrong to refuse to enter a second marriage?

24. What then? Shall we then put off the man and put on the beast, shall we strip off Christ, and put on or over our clothing the clothing of the devil? But when even the teachers of the pagans thought that honourable living ought not be linked with the pursuit of pleasure, because it would be thought that they were amalgamating man with cattle, shall we think it right to absorb the behaviour of animals into the human breast, and inprint on the rational mind the irrational ways of wild beasts?

25. There are many kinds of living beings² which when they have lost their partner, no longer know how to indulge in intercourse, but live as it were a solitary life, and in many cases live on nothing but grass, and know no other place to quench their thirst than the clear stream. We see dogs, which regularly refrain from forbidden food, and check their jaws,³ though famished with fasting, because they have been commanded to abstain. Are men then to be encouraged [to ignore]⁴ what even dumb beasts have learnt from man not to transgress?

1 Acts 17.34. Dionysius was a member of the Areopagus, who was converted by Paul at Athens. The Vulgate and RSV call his wife Damaris.

2 Cf. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 5.19.62.

3 *Ora suspendant*, cf. *suspensis dentibus* (Lucretius 5.1069). While there is no clear allusion to Lucretius, there is something Lucretian about the whole section on the natural simple life.

4 'Ignore' is not in the Latin, but as I understand it, the meaning (not fully expressed) is that fasting is a divine command, which the opponents of asceticism are inviting men to transgress, i.e. they calling on men to ignore commands of God, though even dogs refuse to ignore a human command.

26. But what is more excellent than abstinence, which lends maturity to the years of youth, developing the character of age? For just as through a superfluity of food and drunkenness even a more mature age is enflamed, so the wildness of youth is tempered by sparing use of sumptuous food and by the flowing stream. In the external world fire is extinguished by pouring water on to it; is it then surprising that a draught from a stream will cool the internal heat of bodily passions? For whether a flame is nourished or quenched depends on its food. If hay, stubble, wood, oil and other things of that kind are the food by which fire is fed, then if you withdraw them, or cease to supply them, the fire is extinguished. So likewise the heat of the body is nourished or diminished by food, by food it is stirred up, by food abated. That is why gluttony is the mother of lust.

27. Moreover, what need to prove that temperance is a natural attribute, and in accordance with that divine law which at the very beginning of things gave to us all fountains to drink, all fruits of the trees to eat? After the flood a just man discovered wine a source of temptation to him.¹ Let us therefore use the natural food of temperance as far as we possibly can. But because we are not all strong the Apostle said: *use a little wine for the sake of your frequent ailments*.² So we are not to drink for pleasure, but on account of our ailments; sparingly as a remedy, not excessively for degenerate living.

28. Therefore Elijah whom the Lord was training to the perfection of virtue found *at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water*,³ and *on the strength of that food*⁴ was able to fast forty days. When our fathers crossed the sea on foot they were drinking water not wine.⁵ Fed on homely food and drinking water Daniel checked the rage of lions,⁶ and the Hebrew youths saw the blazing fire feeding all round their limbs harmless to the touch.⁷

29. And why am I to talk only of men? Judith was not in the least suborned by the by the luxurious banquet of Holofernes, and it was solely on the strength of her sobriety that she won the triumph which male strength had given up for lost.⁸ She freed her native land from siege, and killed the

1 Gen. 9.20.

2 1 Tim. 5.23.

3 1 Kg. 19.6 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 19.6).

4 1 Kg. 19.8 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 19.8).

5 Ex. 17.6.

6 Dan. 6.16–21.

7 Dan. 3.19–25.

8 Jdt. 8.6; 12.2.

leader of the force with her own hands. This is a clear example, because it was his dissipation that enervated the man,¹ a warrior dreaded by the nations, and it was her temperance in food that made the woman stronger than men. She was not defeated by the natural weakness of her sex, but she was victorious on account of her abstention from food. Esther won over a proud king by her fasting.² Anna, eighty-four years old, a widow *worshiping in the temple with fasting and prayers day and night* acknowledged Christ,³ whom John, himself a teacher of abstinence, as it were a new angel on earth, had heralded.⁴

30. How foolish was Elisha to feed the prophets with wild and bitter cucumbers!⁵ How forgetful of scripture was Ezra, to restore scripture from memory!⁶ How senseless was Paul, to glory in fasting if there is no benefit in fasting!⁷

31. But how can it be of no benefit, if by means of it sins are cleansed? For if you offer it with humility, with mercy, as Isaiah, inspired by the Divine Spirit said: *Your bones will be made fat and you shall be like a watered garden*.⁸ Your soul therefore and its powers are made fat with the spiritual fat of fasting, and your fruits are multiplied by the fertility of your mind, so that you are filled with the inebriation of sobriety, like the cup of which the prophet says: *And your cup which inebriates, how excellent it is*.⁹

32. But restraint in eating is not the only kind of temperance to be praised, there is also restraint from lust. For it is written: *Do not follow up your lust, but say no to your desires. If you give over your soul to lust, you will become a laughing stock to your enemies*,¹⁰ and further on: *wine and women make apostates even of men of understanding*.¹¹ That is why Paul teaches temperance even in marriage.¹² For one who is incontinent in marriage, who transgresses the apostolic law, is a kind of adulterer.

1 Jdt. 12.20.

2 Est. 4.16.

3 Lk. 2.37–38.

4 Mt. 3.4–11 on John the Baptist.

5 2 Kg. 4.39 (Vulg. 4 Kg. 4.39): *grumis*.

6 Neh. 8.2–8 (Vulg. 2 Ezra 8.2–8).

7 2 Cor. 11.27.

8 Is. 58.11.

9 Ps. 23.5 (Vulg. 22.5). RSV translates Ps. 23.5: 'my cup overflows', using a different text.

10 Sir. 18.30.

11 Sir. 19.2.

12 1 Cor. 7.5.

33. What need for me to say how great is the grace of virginity,¹ which was worthy to be chosen by Christ to be the bodily temple of God, in which, as we read *the whole fullness of deity dwelt bodily*?² A virgin gave birth to the salvation of the world, a virgin brought forth the life of all mankind. So is virginity alone not to be allowed to exist, though in Christ it has benefited all? A virgin carried him whom this world cannot contain or support. And when he was born from the womb of Mary, he preserved the barrier of her genital modesty, and maintained the evidence of her virginity intact. So it was in a virgin that Christ found what he wanted to be his own, what the Lord of all claimed for himself. Through a man and a woman our flesh was expelled from paradise, through a virgin it was united with God.

34. What am I to say about the other Mary, the sister of Moses who as leader of a column of women crossed the narrows of the sea on foot?³ By virtue of the same gift⁴ Thecla⁵ was revered even by lions, with the result that the unfed beasts lay down at the feet of their prey, and offered her their sacred fast, and made no attempt to desecrate the virgin, either with a wanton look,⁶ or with a sharp claw, since the sanctity of a virgin can be desecrated even by a glance.

35. Again with what reverence for virginity did the holy Apostle speak: *Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my advice as someone who has obtained mercy from the Lord.*⁷ He has no command, he offers counsel; for what is over and above the law is not commanded, but is advanced in the form of advice. Personal authority is not presumed, but possession of special favour is demonstrated, and not demonstrated by just anybody but by someone who has earned the mercy of the Lord. Is the advice of these people then better than that of the apostles? The apostle says *I give counsel*; these people think that they must dissuade every girl from a life of virginity.

1 Ambrose's views on virginity are summarised in Ramsey 1997, 51–52. His ascetic writings are listed Ramsey 1997, 60–61. On his influence on Augustine see Walsh 2001, xvii.

2 Col. 2.9.

3 Mary is the Greek form of the Hebrew Miriam, the name of the sister of Moses. There is an allusion to Virg. *Aen.* 11.663.

4 *Quo munere*, i.e. virginity

5 Legendary female disciple and follower of Paul, and martyr, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, New York 1988, 156–59.

6 Cf. Ambrose, *De virginibus* 3.20, making at greater length the point that lions have taken on the nature of men.

7 1 Cor. 17.25.

36. We ought to note the high praise of virginity that has been expressed by a prophet, or rather by Christ through the prophet, in one short verse: *A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed.*¹ Christ says this to his Church, whom he wants to be *a virgin without spot or wrinkle.*² Virginity is a fertile garden, which brings forth very many fruits of good odour. It is *a garden locked*, because it is walled on all sides by a wall of chastity; *a fountain sealed*, because virginity is the fountain and origin of modesty, which preserves the seal of purity intact: a fountain in which shines forth the image of God, because the holy simplicity of a pure mind goes together with an undefiled body.

37. Nor can anybody doubt that the Church is a virgin, which in Corinthians Paul pledged *to present to Christ as a pure virgin.*³ That is why in the earlier epistle he gives his advice and opinion that the gift of virginity is good in that it is not troubled by the pressing exigencies of the world, is not defiled by any of its filth, is not battered by its storms. In the second epistle he stands surety to Christ that he can guarantee the virginity of the Church on account of the purity of his people.⁴

38. Now answer me, Paul, why faced with pressing difficulty you merely give counsel?⁵ Since Paul says: *the unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord*; and adds: *and the unmarried woman or virgin is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit*, therefore the unmarried woman has a wall of her own against the whirlwinds of this world, and being walled in by a barrier of divine protection is discomfited by none of the blasts of this world. Counsel then is something good, because it is beneficial, while commandment fetters. Counsel urges those free to choose, commandment compels even the reluctant. So if a woman follows this counsel, and does not go back on her decision, she has gained a benefit, but if she does go back on her decision she has no case against the apostle.⁶ For it was up to herself to assess her weakness, and therefore she must charge herself with a decision, which has bound her with bonds and fetters heavier than she could bear.

1 S. of S. 4.12.

2 Eph. 5.27.

3 2 Cor. 11.2.

4 Cf. 2. Cor. 11.1

5 This paragraph explains why in 1 Cor. 7.21 Paul gives only gives advice ('opinion' in RSV), and not a command. The reason is that responsibility for the decision for a life of virginity must be with the person that makes the decision; it must be a free decision.

6 She has no right to blame Paul for merely giving advice.

39. And so, like a good doctor, who wishes both to maintain the vigour¹ of the strong, and to give health to the weak, Paul gives counsel to some, while to others he shows a remedy: *The weak man is to eat only vegetables.*² *Let him take a wife.*³ The healthier man looks to feed his vigour on stronger food. Rightly the Apostle added: *But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control and has determined this in his heart, to keep his virgin, he will do well. So he who marries his virgin does well, and he who refrains from marriage does better. A wife is legally bound as long as her husband lives; but if the husband dies she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But to my judgement she is happier if she remains as she is; for I think that I have the Spirit of God.*⁴ This is what it means to possess the counsel of God: to explore everything carefully, and to urge the courses that are better, and point out those which are safer.

40. A guide with forethought points out many routes, so that each man can walk where he wishes by the route best suited to himself, provided only he chooses one by which he can reach the camp [of the saints]. The route of virginity is good, but high and steep and calls for stronger travellers. The route of widowhood is also good, though not so difficult as the previous one, but being rocky and rough requires a more cautious type of traveller. The route of matrimony too is good, but being smooth and straightforward reaches the camp of the saints by a longer detour. This is the one taken by most travellers. So there are rewards for virginity, there are merits in widowhood, there is also a place for a chaste marriage. Each virtue has its own steps and degrees.⁵

41. Therefore stand firm in your heart, so that no one undermines you, so that no one can overthrow you. The Apostle has told us what it is to *stand*.⁶ This is what was said to Moses: *For the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*⁷ For nobody stands, except he who stands by faith, except he who stands anchored in the resolution of his heart. In another passage we

1 Since *virtus* here must be a physical quality I have translated it, and again a little further on, with 'vigour'.

2 Rom. 14.2

3 The advice of 1 Cor. 7.9.

4 1 Cor. 7.37–40.

5 Note that Ambrose does not say that the ascetic life is right for all.

6 Eph. 6.11ff.

7 Ex. 3.5.

read: *But you stand here by me!*¹ Both sentences were spoken by the Lord to Moses, *the place on which you are standing is holy ground; and stand here by me!* Their meaning is 'you are standing by me, if you are standing in the Church'. For this is the holy place, her very ground is productive of holiness, and rich with harvests of virtues.

42. Therefore stand in the Church, stand where I² appeared to you, where I am with you. Where the Church is, there is the most solid basis for your thought, the foundation of your mind: that is where I appeared to you out of the bush.³ You are the bush. I am the fire. The fire is in the bush. I am in your flesh. And the reason I am fire, is to give you light, to burn your thorns, that is your sins, and to reveal to you my grace.

43. Stand firm therefore in your hearts, and put to flight the wolves, which want to carry off prey from the Church. Do not allow yourselves to be idle, or foul-mouthed, or too bitter-tongued. Do not sit in the council of vanity, for it is written: *I did not sit in the council of vanity.*⁴ Do not listen to those who speak against their neighbours, in case by listening to others, you are yourselves induced to denigrate your neighbours, and it is said to each of you: *While sitting you were speaking against your brother.*⁵

44. Those who are seated speak against others, whereas those who stand bless the Lord, for they have been told: *Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord.*⁶ He who sits, to speak in terms of physical posture, is as it were slackened by the inactivity of his body, and the discipline of his mind is relaxed. But the vigilant watchman, the diligent scout, the watchful sentinel on guard in front of the camp, they all stand. The vigorous warrior too, who wishes to forestall the plans of the enemy, is seen standing in line of battle, before the enemy is expected.⁷

45. *Let anyone who is standing, take heed lest he fall.*⁸ Anyone who stands is incapable of slandering, for it is the gossip of people with nothing

1 Deut. 5.31.

2 This is God speaking, an interpretative elaboration of the two sentences cited in the previous sentence.

3 Ex. 3.4: 'God called to him out of the bush'.

4 Ps. 26.4 (Vulg. 25.4) reads: 'I do not sit with false men'.

5 Ps. 49.20 (Vulg. 50.20).

6 Ps. 134.1 (Vulg. 133.1).

7 Cf. Virg. *Georg.* 3.348.

8 1 Cor. 10.12.

to do through which slander is disseminated, and malignity displayed. That is why the prophet says: *I hated the congregation of the malignant, and will not sit among the godless.*¹ And in the thirty-sixth Psalm, which he has packed with moral precepts, the psalmist has placed right at the beginning: *Do not vie with the malignant, and do not vie with evil-doers.*² Malignity does greater harm than malice, because malignity displays neither transparent simplicity nor open malice, but rather artfully concealed hatred and it is more difficult to be on guard against what is hidden than something that is recognised. That is why our Saviour warns us to be on our guard against evil spirits, for they win us over by the appearance of enticing pleasures, and a deceptive show of other things, as they alluringly hold out honour to our ambition, wealth to our cupidity, and the attractions of power to our arrogance.

46. Therefore malignity must be absent from every activity, but most especially in the appointment of a bishop, on whom all model their life, so that by an unemotional and tranquil decision that man is preferred over all others, who has been chosen out of them all, in order to heal all. *For a gentle-minded man is a physician of the heart.*³ And it is of the heart that in the Gospel our Lord said that he was a physician: *Those who are well have no need of a physician but those that are sick.*⁴

47. He is the good physician who has taken our weaknesses upon himself, who has healed our illnesses, yet as it is written, *he did not exalt himself to be made a high priest*, but *he who spoke to him*, his Father, said: *You are my son, today I have begotten thee.* So he also said in another place: *You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.*⁵ And as he was to be the type of all priests, he took on our flesh, so that *in the days of his flesh, he might offer up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to God the Father. And through what he suffered, although he was the Son, he was to be seen to have learnt obedience, which he might teach to us, to become*

1 Ps. 26.5. (Vulg. 25.5).

2 Ps. 36.1 (Vulg.), but RSV 37.1 reads: 'Fret not yourself because of the wicked, be not envious of wrongdoers'.

3 Pr. 14.30, but neither Vulgate nor RSV has precisely this meaning. RSV: 'A tranquil mind, gives life to the flesh'.

4 Mt. 9.12.

5 Hebr. 5.5–6. Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and high priest of the most high God who greeted Abraham with bread and wine (Gen. 14.17–24). In Christian interpretation he figures Jesus, in his capacity as Christian high priest (Hebr. 4.14), as is fully explained in Hebr. 7.

the source of our salvation.¹ Finally after fulfilling² his suffering and having as it were fulfilled his mission, he gave health to all, and bore the sin of all.

48. He himself chose Aaron as high priest in order that human greed might not have the decisive say in the election of a priest, but the grace of God, so that there might be neither a volunteering for election, nor an appropriation of office, but a divine vocation; so that a man is chosen to make the offerings for sins, who can suffer with sinners, *because he himself*, as scripture says, *is beset with human weakness*. Nobody ought to assume the honour for himself, but a bishop ought to be called by God, like Aaron.³ So even Christ did not demand the priesthood but received it.

49. But in the end, since the succession derived by descent from Aaron involved heirs of his family rather than sharers in his justice, there came the fulfilment of the typological story of the Melchizedek about whom we read in the old Testament,⁴ with the arrival of the true Melchizedek, the true king of peace, the true king of justice, for this is what the name means.⁵ As he is *without father, without mother, without genealogy, and having neither beginning of days, nor an end of life*,⁶ Melchizedek is taken to point forward to the Son of God, who knew no mother in that divine generation, and had no knowledge of his father in that birth from the Virgin Mary, and who being born of the Father alone before this world began, and born of the virgin alone in this world, clearly could not have a beginning of days, since he was in the beginning. Moreover how could he have an end of life, who is the origin of life for all? He is *the beginning and the end of all*.⁷ But this phrase is also cited by way of example that a bishop ought to be, as it were, without father and without mother, in that his election should depend, not on the nobility of his family but on the grace of his way of life and the pre-eminence of his virtues.

50. Let him have faith and maturity of character, not one without the other, but let both together coincide with good works and actions. That is why the Apostle Paul wants us to be imitators of those who through faith and

1 Hebr. 5.7–9, with some omissions, and changes from indicative of narrative to subjunctive of purpose.

2 *Consummatis passionibus ... consummatus ipse*: both 'having completed' and 'having been made perfect'.

3 Based on Hebr. 5.2–4.

4 Gen. 14.17–20.

5 Hebr. 7.2.

6 Genesis says nothing about the descent of Melchizedek, and this the author of Hebr. 7.13 interpreted as meaning that Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ.

7 Rev. 21.6.

patience possess the promises of Abraham,¹ who by his patience merited to receive and possess the grace of the blessing promised to himself. David the prophet admonishes us that we ought to be imitators of the holy Aaron, for he has set him among the saints of the Lord for us to imitate, saying: *Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was also among those who called on his name.*²

51. This man clearly deserves to be set up as an example to be followed by all. For when a terrible death was creeping through the people as a punishment for their obstinacy,³ he threw himself between the living and the dead, in order to stop death in its track, so that no more might perish. He was indeed a man of priestly mind and character who like a good shepherd with pious zeal offered his life for the Lord's flock.⁴ Therefore he broke the sting of death,⁵ he held up its charge, refused to let it pass. His devotion furthered his merit: because he offered himself on behalf of the very people who were resisting him.

52. So let the dissidents learn to fear the anger of the Lord, and to submit to their bishops.⁶ What? Was it not for dissent that the gaping earth swallowed up Dathan and Abiram and Korah? For when Korah, Dathan and Abiram had stirred up two hundred and fifty men against Moses and Aaron, to break away from them, the men rebelled saying: *Let it be enough for you that in the entire synagogue all are holy, and the Lord is among them.*⁷

53. Wherefore the Lord was angry and spoke to the whole synagogue.⁸ The Lord considered – and *he knows those that are his*⁹ – and he drew the holy ones to himself, and those whom he did not choose, he did not draw unto himself. And the Lord ordered that Korah and all who had risen with him against Moses and Aaron, the priests of the Lord, should take censers and put incense into them, so that he who had been chosen by the Lord, should be declared to be holy among the Levites¹⁰ of the Lord.

1 Cf. Hebr. 11.8ff.

2 Ps. 99.6 (Vulg. 98.6).

3 *Contumacia*, the mutiny of Korah is meant: Num. 16.

4 Jon. 10.11.

5 Cf. 1 Cor. 15.55ff.

6 *Sacerdotes*, but Ambrose is now applying the lesson to Vercelli.

7 Num. 16.3 (shortened).

8 In Num. 16.5 it is Moses who 'spoke to Korah and all his company'.

9 2 Tim. 2.15.

10 The Levites had the duty of assisting the hereditary priests of the house of Aaron. The rising of Korah and his followers was a revolt of some of the Levites against their inferiority to Aaron and Moses.

54. And Moses said to Korah: *Hear me now, you sons of Levi; is it so small a thing for you that the Lord has separated you from the synagogue¹ of Israel?*² and further on: *and are you, and your entire synagogue, seeking to discharge the duties of the priesthood, that you have gathered before God in this manner? And what is Aaron that you murmur against him?*³

55. Therefore consider what the causes of their offence were, that they wished to discharge the duties of the priesthood though unworthy, that they murmured because they were censuring the judgement of God in the election of their priest. It was for that reason that an immense fear seized the whole people, and everyone was filled with dread of punishment. Among general entreaty that not all should perish because of the arrogance of a few,⁴ those guilty of the crime are marked out, and from the body of the whole people two hundred and fifty men together with their instigators are separated. With a roar the earth splits in the midst of the people. A gulf appears, yawning into the depths. The guilty are swallowed up and are removed from all the elements of this world, so as not to pollute either the air with their breath, or the sky with their sight, or the sea with their touch, or the earth with their burial.⁵

56. The punishment ended, but the malice did not end. In fact the punishment itself gave rise to murmuring by the people, because it was said that it was through the priests that the people had perished. Angry at this the Lord would have destroyed all, if he had not been dissuaded, first by the prayers of Moses and Aaron, and then by the intercession of Aaron his priest, and chosen to make those ungrateful men feel the greater shame of owing their lives to the men whose grace they were refusing to acknowledge.

57. Even Maria the prophetess,⁶ who together with her brethren had crossed the straits of the sea on foot, because she had found fault with Moses, her brother, through yet being ignorant of the mystery⁷ of the Ethiopian woman,⁸ came to be so scarred with the spots of leprosy, that she could hardly

1 Vulgate has 'from all the people' (*populo*) and in 11: 'all your group' (*omnis globus*).

2 Num. 16.8–9.

3 Num. 16.10–11 (shortened).

4 Num. 16.22.

5 Num. 16.26–35.

6 Miriam, the sister of Moses.

7 'Mystery' here and often elsewhere refers to an allegorical meaning.

8 The 'Ethiopian woman' is the wife of Moses. In RSV she is described as 'the Cushite woman'. Her not being an Israelite was the reason for Miriam and Aaron finding fault with Moses. In Ambrose's allegorical interpretation she stands for the Church, while Miriam stands for the Synagogue.

have been cured of the dreadful infection if Moses had not pleaded for her.¹ This finding fault of Miriam is to be understood as a type of the synagogue, which being ignorant of the sacred mystery of the Ethiopian woman, that is of the Church of the gentiles, day by day grumbles at and envies the people by whose faith she will be saved from the leprosy of infidelity, according to which we read that: *because a blindness has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.*²

58. And so that we may learn that what is effective in a priest³ is divine and not human grace: of the many rods that Moses had received from the tribes and deposited, only that of Aaron budded;⁴ and so the people realised that what is to be looked for in a priest is the gift⁵ of divine election, and they ceased to claim an equal power⁶ for themselves and their human election, even though previously they had thought it right to demand for themselves an equal right of first choice.⁷ But to return to that rod, what meaning could it have other than that the grace of the priestly office never withers, and that it is to hold the flower of power entrusted to it with all humility in its position of privilege; or perhaps that the flowering rod can also be interpreted as a mystery?⁸ For we think that it was not for nothing that this incident happened close to the death of Aaron.⁹ It seems to be implied that the older people,¹⁰ grown rotten through the inveterate infidelity of its ancient priesthood, will in the last days be renewed by imitation of the Church, and with a revived grace will bring back to zeal for faith and devotion a flower that has been dead through so many ages.

59. As for the fact that after the death of Aaron God ordered not the whole people but only Moses, who is among the priests of the Lord, to dress

1 Num. 12.1–16.

2 Rom. 11.25.

3 Here, as in the whole discussion of the source of Aaron's priestly authority, Ambrose is of course concerned with the proper election of a bishop.

4 Num. 17.8.

5 *Munus*.

6 *Gratiam*: in this paragraph *munus* and *gratia* seem to be used synonymously.

7 *Parem praerogativam*.

8 As in p. 290 n. 1 above 'mystery' is a covert allegorical significance.

9 Num. 21.22–29. Moses' role in the appointment of a successor to Aaron is taken to foreshadow the rule that a bishop (or bishops) must take a leading part in the appointment of a bishop.

10 The Jews

Aaron's son, Eleazar, in the clothes stripped off Aaron the priest,¹ what else can it mean than that we are to learn that a priest is needed to consecrate a priest, and that he should dress him in the vestments, that is with the priestly virtues, and that after he has made sure that he lacks none of the priestly garments, and that everything is as it should be, he should escort him to the sacred altars? For the man who is to offer prayers on behalf of the people ought to be chosen by the Lord, approved by the priests to make certain that there is nothing to cause serious offence in the man whose duty it will be to intercede for the offences of others.² For to possess average virtue is not sufficient for a priest, who must take care to keep clear not only of the graver sins, but even of the most trivial. He must be quick to show compassion, not regret a promise, restore him who has fallen, sympathise with grief, always be mild-mannered, love piety and drive away or at least suppress anger. He must be a sort of trumpet to rouse his people to devotion, or to charm them to tranquillity.

60. There is an old saying: 'Train yourself to be one person',³ so that your life comes to look like a picture, always displaying the same image, which has been given to it. But how can anyone be one person if he is now inflamed with anger, now boiling over with savage indignation, if his face is now red as fire, now changed to a wan pallor, and instantly mottled and many coloured? Granted that it is natural to be angry, or that frequently there is justification, nevertheless to be human is to restrain one's anger, not to let oneself to be carried away by rage, like that of a lion, so as to become incapable of being pacified. To be human means not to propagate slanders,⁴ not to embitter a family quarrel; for it is written: *a hot-tempered man digs up sin*.⁵ He is not one person who has a split mind, not one person who cannot control himself when he is angry. On this point David aptly said: *Be angry, but sin not!*⁶ For such a man does not control his anger, but yields to his nature, which cannot be abolished, but can be alleviated. Therefore although we will be angry, our passion should only have as much scope as is natural, not such as to constitute sin, which is against nature. For it is

1 Num. 20.26–30.

2 The stress on the constitutional and ritual aspects of the election of a bishop is not found in *De officiis*.

3 The saying is not cited anywhere else.

4 Literally: 'not to sow noise'.

5 Pr. 15.18; RSV reads 'stirs up strife'.

6 Ps. 4.4.

insupportable that he who undertakes to govern others should be unable to govern himself.

61. Therefore the Apostle has offered the rule: *A bishop must be above reproach.*¹ And further on he says: *For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered, or a drunkard, or an assassin, or greedy for gain.*² For how can compassion in a steward be compatible with avarice and greed?

62. I have put forward these points, which I have learnt should be avoided. But our instructor in virtue is the Apostle, who teaches us that those who contradict are to be rebuked with patience; who instructs us that a bishop ought to be *the husband of one wife*,³ not meaning to exclude an unmarried man,⁴ for that belongs to precept which lies beyond the law, but in order that the bishop may preserve the grace of his baptism⁵ by chastity in marriage. Nor does apostolic authority encourage him to remarry, to beget children in his episcopate. For the Apostle speaks of one already having children,⁶ not of begetting them, nor of entering a second marriage.

63. I have not passed over this topic because many argue that *the husband of one wife*⁷ applies to a wife married after baptism, on the assumption that through baptism the defect, which had been a barrier to remarriage, was washed away. It is certainly the case that all defects and sins are washed away, so that if somebody has polluted his body with many women to whom he has not joined himself by the law of marriage, all will be forgiven him; but if someone should marry again, previous marriages are not dissolved. For sin is washed away by baptism, the law is not. For marriage is not a sinful but a legal state. It follows that what is prescribed by law is not pardoned as a sin, but upheld as law. That is why the Apostle laid down the law saying: *If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife.*⁸ So the husband of one wife is eligible under the law governing the priesthood because he is

1 1 Tim. 3.2.

2 Titus 1.7.

3 1 Tim. 3.2.

4 *Exsortem coniugii*. Cc. 62–64 show that the rules about the marriage of bishops that Ambrose is upholding were controversial; cf. *De off.* 1.50.257–58.

5 *Ablutionis suae gratiam*.

6 1 Tim. 3.4.

7 Ambrose counters the argument that a bishop who is a widower may remarry because baptism has, as it were, annulled his first marriage. This was argued by the Greek bishops and Jerome. But Ambrose (*De off.* 1.247) disagrees, as does Augustine.

8 Titus 1.6.

blameless; while someone who has entered a second marriage, though he has certainly not incurred the sin of pollution, has disqualified himself from the priesthood.

64. We have said what is the position in law, let us also say what it is in reason. But first of all we must bear in mind that this rule concerning the bishop and the presbyter was not only made by the Apostle, but that the fathers assembled at Nicaea wrote into the acts of the council that no-one ought to be a cleric who had entered into a second marriage.¹ For how can a priest console a widow, and honour her, and urge her to remain in her widowed state to preserve that loyalty to her husband which he has not preserved for his own earlier marriage?² Or what distinction would there be between the people and the bishop, if both were obligated to the same rules? The life of a bishop ought to be superior, just as his grace is. For a man who binds others by his instructions ought himself to adhere to legitimate instructions applying to himself.

65. How strongly I strove to resist ordination, and eventually, when compulsion was being applied, that ordination might at least be postponed.³ But the rules were of no avail; popular pressure prevailed. The western bishops nevertheless approved my ordination by a formal decision, and the eastern bishops did the same by following the precedent.⁴ It is indeed forbidden to ordain a new convert⁵ in case *he is puffed up with conceit*.⁶ If force prevented the postponement of the ordination, the man applying force is held responsible, provided that the humility appropriate to the office is not lacking in the candidate. No blame is attached if the accusation (of conceit) does not stick.⁷

1 No such canon of Nicaea is known. Zelzer in a note on c. 63, line 650ff., suggests that Ambrose misunderstood canon 3.

2 It might be suggested that Ambrose insists on this point because a candidate for the episcopate whom he opposed had remarried after the death of his first wife. But this need not be so; Ambrose amplifies a point already made in *De off.* 1.50.257.

3 Ambrose on his own election: *De off.* 1.1.4; *De paen.* 2.8.67; Paulinus, V. *Ambr.* 6–9.

4 Nectarius, the *praetor urbanus*, was elected bishop of Constantinople in 381.

5 Council of Nicaea, canon 2.

6 1 Tim. 3.6.

7 The translation of this paragraph is rather free. As I understand it, it is a parenthesis instigated by the preceding sentence: 'a man who binds others by his instructions ought to observe the instructions of the law as far as he himself is concerned'. Ambrose remembers that his own election was not in accordance with 'the instructions of the law', and feels obliged to write a paragraph of personal apology. It might be that he envisages a similar situation at Vercelli, and

66. But if so much deliberation goes into in the ordination of the bishop in other churches, how great care is required at Vercelli where it would seem that two qualities are demanded from the bishop in equal degree: monastic asceticism and ecclesiastical discipline. For it was Eusebius of holy memory who was the first in the West to combine these conflicting qualifications in that even when he resided in the city, he observed monastic rules and governed his Church soberly with fasting.¹ For there results a great increase in the grace of a bishop, if he binds young men to the practice of abstinence and the rule of chastity, and while they continue to live in the city, separates them from the city's customs and social life.

67. That is why Elijah,² Elisha and John, son of Elizabeth,³ those famous men, were so effective, men who clothed in *shirts of hides and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, wandered about in the desert*⁴ among steep and wooded mountains, pathless rocks, rough caves, marshy ditches, of whose society the world was not worthy.⁵ That is why the famous Daniel, Ananias, Azarias, Misael, who were being catered for in the royal palace, lived on a diet of abstinence, with rough food and haphazard drink, as though in the desert.⁶ Rightly therefore did these servants of a king prevail over kingdoms, and shaking off the yoke disdain their captivity, subjugate powers, conquer elements, quench the force of fire, subdue flames, blunt the edge of the sword, stop the lions' jaws,⁷ and when they seemed to be weakening, were found to have grown stronger. They did not flee the mockery of men seeing that they were anticipating the rewards of heaven. They did not dread the darkness of prison since the grace of eternal light was shining upon them.

68. Following their example, the holy Eusebius departed from his land and kin, and chose journeying abroad rather than ease at home.⁸ For the sake

is hinting that Milanese precedent might be followed there, hence the present tense in the last sentence. But the whole letter is so generally phrased that it does not appear to give concrete advice relating to particular candidates.

1 He introduced the practice of having the bishop and his clergy living a communal life under monastic rules.

2 1 Kg. 19 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 19).

3 Mt. 3.4; Lk. 3.2.

4 Hebr. 11.37.

5 Hebr. 11.38.

6 Dan. 1.6–16; three Israelites brought up at the court of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

7 Hebr. 11.33–34.

8 Eusebius of Vercelli and Dionysius of Milan were exiled by Constantius (not Valens as in footnote on p. 271 of Zelzer's edition) after they had refused to sign the condemnation of

of the faith he preferred and chose the hardships of exile, having as his companion Dionysius of blessed memory who put voluntary exile before the friendship of the emperor. And so these memorable men, though ringed by weapons and walled in by an army, were able to triumph over the imperial power, as they were dragged out of their church; and since in exchange for their contempt for earthly things they acquired courage of mind and the strength of a king, military force and the din of weapons could not rob them of their faith, and they subdued the ferocious nature of a savage beast, so that it was unable to injure them. *For the anger of a king is the anger of a lion*, as you read in the Proverbs.¹

69. He, by repeatedly asking them to change their minds, confessed himself defeated;² but they thought their pen more powerful than his swords of iron. In the end it was unbelief that was wounded and fell, the faith of the saints was unwounded. Men for whom a heavenly home was waiting did not need a grave in their native land. They wandered all over the earth, *having nothing yet possessing everything*.³ Wherever they were sent appeared to them a place of delights; and they lacked nothing, because they were rich in an abundance of faith. Therefore they made others rich, being themselves poor in spending money, but profuse in grace. They were tested in hunger, in toil, in prison, through sleepless nights: they did not falter.⁴ Out of weakness they became strong.⁵ They did not look for the allurements of luxury, seeing that they grew fat on fasting. The torrid summer did not scorch men whom the expectation of eternal grace was keeping cool. The cold of the icy regions did not break them seeing that in their ardent spirit their devotion was enjoying spring.⁶ They did not fear the bonds of men, from which Jesus had released them, they did not long to be redeemed from death, being certain that by Christ they would be resurrected.

70. Therefore the holy Dionysius demanded in his prayers that he might end his life in exile, so that he might not return to find the loyalty of people and clergy confused by the teachings and practice of the unbelievers; and he

Athanasius at a council held at Milan in 355. Athanasius, *Hist. Ar.* 33–35. On the circumstances see Humphries 1999, 116–17; or a revisionist interpretation see McLynn 1994, 16–21.

1 Pr. 19.12.

2 The emperor Constantius.

3 2 Cor. 6.10.

4 Cf. 2 Cor. 11.27ff.

5 Cf. Hebr. 11.34.

6 Eusebius was exiled to Scythopolis in Palestine, then to Cappadocia, and finally to the Thebaid in Egypt (Williams 1995, 62). He returned in 362, after the death of Constantius.

earned this gift of grace in as much as he brought back with himself the peace of the Lord in an atmosphere of harmony.¹ So it happened that while holy Eusebius was the first to raise the standard of confession, Dionysius died in exile with a claim close enough to that of the martyrs.²

71. This endurance on the part of the holy Eusebius was nourished by the monastic life, and by becoming accustomed to a stricter rule he acquired the capacity to endure hardships. For who would dispute that these two things are especially efficacious in creating a more dedicated form of Christian piety: the rules of the clergy, and the observances of the monks? The first is a training to be courteous and well behaved, the latter a training in abstinence and endurance. The first operates as it were on a stage, the other in secret; the first is watched, the other hidden. Therefore the good athlete says: *We have become a spectacle to this world*.³ He certainly was worthy to have angels as spectators, when he was competing for the prize of Christ,⁴ when he was struggling to establish⁵ the life of angels on earth, and to confute the wickedness of angels in heaven; for he was contending against *the spiritual hosts of wickedness*.⁶ Rightly the world watched him, that the world might imitate him.

72. So one life is lived in the stadium, the other in a cave.⁷ The one struggles against the turmoil of the world, the other against the lust of the flesh. One subdues the pleasures of the body, the other shuns them. One is pleasanter, the other safer. One governs itself, the other chastises itself, yet each denies itself in order to be made Christ's; for it was said to those who would be perfect:⁸ *If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*.⁹ The man who follows Christ therefore is one who can say: *It is no longer I that lives, but Christ who lives in me*.¹⁰

1 When Dionysius was exiled from Milan, Constantius imposed Auxentius as bishop on the city, and Auxentius remained bishop until his death, which led to Ambrose's election. Dionysius had meanwhile died in exile in Asia Minor. See Humphries 1999, 116–17. Ambrose seems to allude to the return of his relics. See Basil, *Ep.* 197, on the return of his relics. Is the second half of that letter after all genuine? Otherwise Barnes 2001, 231–32.

2 Wood and Walford 1881 translate 'won a title even higher than martyrdom', but that does not make sense to me. To die naturally in exile is a kind of martyrdom, but surely less than to be executed.

3 1 Cor. 4.9.

4 1 Cor. 9.24.

5 Wood and Alford 1881 have 'that he might live on earth an angel's life'.

6 Eph. 6.22.

7 'The cave' stands for the ascetic life of monks.

8 Mt. 19.20.

9 Mt. 16.24.

10 Gal. 2.20.

73. Paul denied himself, when knowing that bonds and tribulations were waiting for him in Jerusalem, he voluntarily offered himself to these dangers, saying: *I do not account my life of greater value to myself, if only I may accomplish my course, and the ministry of the word which I received from the Lord Jesus.*¹ Accordingly, though many standing round him were weeping and imploring, he did not change his mind. So demanding a critic of itself is a ready faith.

74. So one life fights, the other withdraws. One overcomes temptations, the other shuns them. One strives to triumph over the world, the other to banish it.² To the former the world has been crucified, and it to the world;³ to the latter it does not exist.⁴ The former has more temptations and therefore a greater victory, the latter has fewer lapses and an easier protection.⁵

75. So Elijah⁶ himself to confirm the words of his mouth was sent by the Lord to hide himself by the brook Cherith.⁷ Ahab threatened him, Jezebel threatened him; Elijah was afraid and arose, and renewed by the strength of that intelligible food,⁸ went forty days and forty nights to mount Horeb, and entered a cave, and rested there, and so prepared he was later sent on a mission to anoint kings.⁹ By dwelling in the wilderness he was therefore hardened to endurance, and being as it were nourished on coarse food to the fatness of virtue, emerged strengthened.

76. John too grew in stature in the desert, and it was there that he first exercised his strength of character that later he might rebuke the king.¹⁰

77. When speaking of holy Elijah's dwelling in the desert we alluded only briefly, as if from laziness, to the names of the localities. As these are

1 Acts. 20.24.

2 Reading *exsulat* instead of Zelzer's *exultat*.

3 Gal. 6.14.

4 Literally: 'it is unknown'.

5 Cc. 71–72 compare the state of secular clergy with that of monks. It is interesting that Ambrose here evidently awards higher merit to condition of the clergy, allowing to the monastic life that it is safer. One might compare Paul's comparison of the unmarried and the married life. For Ambrose, the monk's life is second best, as the married state is for Paul.

6 In the following Elijah is presented not as the inspired prophet but as a novice being prepared for his prophetic role by a life of asceticism.

7 1 Kg. 17.3ff. (Vulg. 3 Kg. 17.3ff.).

8 *Intellegibilis*: the word is not in the Vulgate, nor is an equivalent in the RSV. In the sense 'belonging to the intellectual world' it is a Neoplatonist term, and seems to have been introduced as such by Ambrose. The implication is that the asceticism achieves the insight which Neoplatonists claimed to achieve through their philosophy; cf. *cibo mystico* in p. 323 n. 2 below.

9 1 Kg. 19.1–16 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 19.1–16).

10 Lk. 3.2.

not without significance, it seems fitting to go back to find out what they mean. Elijah was sent to the brook Cherith. There ravens fed him, brought him bread in the morning and flesh in the evening. Not without cause was bread brought in the morning, for it *strengthens a man's heart*.¹ For how was the prophet to be fed if not with sacramental food?² Around evening meat was served. Understand what you are reading! For Cherith means³ understanding.⁴ Horeb signifies 'the whole heart', or 'as it were heart'.⁵ The Latin translation of Beersheba is either 'seventh well',⁶ or 'of the sacrament'.⁷

78. Elijah first went to Beersheba,⁸ to the mysteries of the holy law and the sacraments of the divine law,⁹ afterwards he was sent to the brook, to the currents of that *river which makes glad the city of God*.¹⁰ Here you perceive the two Testaments and their single author.¹¹ The ancient scriptures are as a deep and dark well, out of which you have to draw water with difficulty. It is not full, because he who is to fill it had not yet come, as he said in after times, *I am not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it*.¹² So the holy man was ordered by Christ to cross the river,¹³ because he who drinks from the New Testament not only drinks from the river, but *in addition rivers of living water will flow from his belly*,¹⁴ rivers of understanding, rivers of knowledge, spiritual rivers. But in times of irreligion these rivers dried up, to prevent the sacrilegious from drinking, to prevent the irreligious from imbibing.

1 Ps. 104.15 (Vulg. 103.15).

2 *Cibo mystico*, cf. *escae intellegibilis* in p. 322 n. 8 above.

3 The interpretation is from Jerome, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, ed. P. Antin, *CCLat.* 72 (1969), 110.16.

4 *Intellectus*, echoing the *intellegibilis* of p. 322 n. 8 above.

5 According to Jerome it means 'drought' or 'desert': *Lib. int. hebr. nom. (Hebrew Names)* 77.18 (ed. Antin 101.13). In Ambrose's interpretation the story has two equally valid levels: at one level Horeb is a place just as Cherith is a river, at the other it is something that happens in Elijah's mind.

6 So Jerome, *Lib. int. hebr. nom.* 62.20 (ed. Antin 103.3).

7 Here Ambrose appears to have confused the place Beersheba and the name Bethsheba, cf. Jerome, *Lib. int. hebr. nom.* ed. Antin, 110.5. In c. 78 Ambrose uses each allegorical meaning in turn.

8 In fact he went to the brook first (1 Kg. 3 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 3) and to Beersheba later (1 Kg. 19.3).

9 I.e. the Old Testament and the New Testament.

10 Ps. 46.4 (Vulg. 45.4).

11 The two testaments have the same author, God, and the same meaning but the meaning does not lie on the surface.

12 Mt. 5.17.

13 He had to cross the Jordan because the Cherithis flows east of it, 1 Kg. 6 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 6).

14 Jn 7.38.

79. The ravens acknowledged the prophet of the Lord, whom the Jews were not acknowledging. The ravens fed him whom that royal and noble people was persecuting. Who is Jezebel, who was persecuting him, other than the synagogue, a river flowing to no purpose,¹ to no purpose overflowing with scriptures, which it neither observes, nor understands? Who were the ravens who fed him, if not those whose young call on Him,² and those *to whose cattle he gives fodder*, as we read *he gives fodder also to the young of the ravens calling on him*?³ The ravens knew whom they were feeding, because they were close to understanding, and they carried nourishment to that river of sacred knowledge.

80. He⁴ nourishes the prophet who both understands and observes what has been written. It is our faith that gives him strengthening drink, it is our progress that gives him nourishment; he feeds on our minds and senses. His conversation feasts on our understanding. We give him bread in the morning, when living in the light of the Gospel we offer him the support of our hearts. By these he is nourished, by these he grows strong, with these he fills the mouths of those who fast, to whom the irreligion of the Jews was offering no food of faith. For them all prophetic discourse amounts to a fast, since they cannot see the riches it contains; it is a scanty and thin diet which cannot bring fat to their jaws.

81. Perhaps Elijah was brought meat in the evening,⁵ to figure the stronger food, which Corinthians with frail understanding could not swallow, and were therefore fed on milk by the Apostle.⁶ The stronger food was therefore offered towards the evening of this world, bread in the morning. And as it was the Lord who ordered this nourishment to be provided, it is apt to cite here the word of the prophet: *You will give joy to the outgoings of the morning and of the evening*;⁷ and further on: *You have prepared their food, for this is how it is prepared*.⁸

1 This continues the metaphor of a river standing for the revelation and understanding of God, as in Jn 7.38, and Is. 44.3, 55.1, 58.11.

2 C. 80 shows that the ravens now allegorise men of faith, in contrast to the Jews who offer no food. Ambrose has changed the interpretation of the Elijah episode without warning. He is now making the new and interesting point that a bishop draws strength from his community.

3 Ps. 147.9 (Vulg. 146.9).

4 'He' here is a member of the Christian community whose faith gives strength 'to the prophet', that is, the bishop. The bishop not only gives but also receives.

5 1 Kg. 17.6 (Vulg. 3 Kg. 17.6).

6 1 Cor. 3.2.

7 Ps. 65.8 (Vulg. 64.8).

8 Ps. 65.9 (Vulg. 64.9).

82. But I think that I have said enough about the teacher.¹ We must now examine the life of the disciples² who have taken on that laudable role,³ and make night and day echo with hymns. This is undoubtedly an angelic service;⁴ to be ever occupied with the praise of God, and with frequent prayers to placate and petition the Lord. They are busy with reading, or occupy their minds with continuous work.⁵ Kept apart from all female society, they provide a safe supervision for each other. What a life this is, in which there is nothing for you to fear and much to imitate! The hardship of fasting is compensated by tranquillity of mind, alleviated by familiarity, made bearable by rest, or beguiled by activity. It is not troubled by concerns of the world, not preoccupied with the troubles of others, not harassed by the distractions of the city.

83. You are well aware what kind of teacher needs to be appointed in order both to maintain this service and to propagate it. We will be able to find the man if you seek him unanimously, that is provided that when one of you thinks that he has been wronged by another, you forgive each other. For it is justice not only that you do not injure one who has not injured you, but also that you forgive him who has done you an injury. We are often injured by the fraud of another, by the deceit of somebody very close to us; surely we do not consider the mark of virtuous behaviour to avenge deceit with deceit, to pay back fraud with a fraud? For if justice is virtue it must be above suspicion, and not repel wickedness with wickedness. What kind of virtue is it for yourself to do what you are going to punish in another? That is infection by wickedness, not its punishment. Moreover it makes no difference whom you wrong, whether he is just or unjust, since the requirement is that you do not wrong anybody. Nor does your motive for behaving badly matter, whether you are seeking retaliation, or simply want to injure, since in neither case does wrongdoing escape censure. For there is no difference between wrongdoing and injustice. That is why you have been told: *Do not be a wrongdoer among wrongdoers, be not envious of them that work iniquity*;⁶ and earlier the psalmist said: *I hate the company of wrongdoers*.⁷ He clearly included

1 I.e. the bishop.

2 The clergy who, at Vercelli, live a communal and monastic life.

3 *Illam laudem*. Wood and Walford 1881 translate: 'praise the Divine Name'.

4 *Militia*.

5 *Operibus continuis*: this would seem to mean 'continuous or regular worship', the 'work of God' / *opus dei* of the Rule of Benedict.

6 Ps. 37.1 (Vulg. 36.1).

7 Ps. 26.5 (Vulg. 25.5).

all, and exempted none. He seized on the wrongdoing, he did not ask for its cause.

84. But what better model is there than that of divine justice? For the Son of God says: *Love your enemies*, and again he says: *Pray for those who slander and persecute you*.¹ To eliminate the desire for revenge in the perfect he goes as far as to command love even of those doing them harm. And because in the Old Scriptures he had said: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*,² he says in the Gospel that we should pray for those that have harmed us, so that he who has promised that vengeance is not obliged to exact it from them. For he wishes to dismiss at your request a course of action which he has agreed by his promise. But if you must have vengeance, you have it, because the unjust man is punished more severely by his own state of mind than by the severity of a judge.

85. And since nobody can live without suffering some adversity, we must ensure that adversity does not strike us through our own fault. For no man is sentenced more severely by another man's judgement than a foolish man is by his own, since he is himself the cause of his own wretchedness. Therefore let us keep away from affairs that are troublesome and wholly contentious, which bring no reward but involve a lot of trouble. Although we ought to make an effort to avoid ever having to regret any decision or act of ours, it is the concern of a prudent man to make sure that he has such regrets as rarely as possible, for never to have to repent of any action is peculiar to God alone. What reward does justice bring other than tranquillity of mind? Or what is it to live justly other than to live with tranquillity?³ The example set by the master determines the condition of the whole household. But if this is the ideal in the household, how much more in the Church where rich and poor, *slave and freeborn, Greek and Scythian*,⁴ noble⁵ and commoner, are all one in Christ.

86. Let nobody presume that he ought to receive more deference just because he is rich. In the Church that man counts as rich who is rich in faith.

1 Mt. 5.44ff. RSV omits 'who slander you'.

2 Deut. 32.35.

3 The point is made specifically for the Church of Vercelli, which, as we were told at the beginning of the letter, was torn by discord. Tranquillity here has the specific sense of concord, which is the point made by the citation of Col. 3.11, and more specifically by Ambrose's 'one in Christ', where Vulgate has 'Christ in all', as have the RSV and the Greek text.

4 Col. 3.11.

5 An *honoratus* is a man of senatorial rank, a *plebeius* an ordinary, untitled, person.

For the whole world of riches belongs to the man who is faithful. Why marvel at the idea that the faithful man possesses the world, seeing that he possesses the heritage of Christ, which is more precious than the world? *You were ransomed with precious blood*¹ was said to all, not only to the rich. But if you want to be rich follow him who says: *be holy in all your conduct*.² He does not say this to the rich, but to all, because he judges *without consideration of persons*, as his good witness, the Apostle, says.³ And therefore he says: *conduct yourself during this time of your exile* not with self-indulgence, not with pride not with arrogance but *with fear*.⁴ You have been given time on this earth, not perpetuity. Make use of the time, knowing that you are due to depart!

87. Do not put your trust in riches, because all those things will be left behind. Faith alone will go with you. Admittedly justice will accompany you too, if faith leads the way. Why do riches flatter you? *Not with silver or gold*, not with possessions, not with garments of silk *were you ransomed from your futile ways, but with the precious blood of Christ Jesus*.⁵ Therefore he is rich who will be the heir of God, the coheir of Christ.⁶ So do not despise the poor man! He makes you rich. Do not scorn the man in want! *That poor man cried and the Lord heard him*.⁷ Do not reject the man in need! *Christ too became poor when he was rich, but he became poor because of you, that by his poverty he might make you rich*.⁸ Do not exalt yourself as if you were rich; Christ sent out his apostles without any money.

88. Therefore the first of them said: *Silver and gold have I none*.⁹ He glories in his poverty as if he was fleeing from pollution. *Silver*, he said, *and gold I have none*; not 'gold and silver'. He does not know the use of them, and therefore does not know their order in value. *Silver and gold have I none*, but I have faith. Sufficient wealth for me is the name of Jesus, which is above every name.¹⁰ Silver I have not, and I do not need it. Gold I have

1 1 Petr. 19.

2 1 Petr. 15.

3 1 Petr. 17.

4 1 Petr. 17.

5 1 Petr. 18.

6 Cf. Rom. 8.17.

7 Ps. 34.6 (Vulg. 33.6).

8 1 Cor. 8.9.

9 Acts 3.6.

10 Phil. 2.9.

not, and I do not want it, but I have what you rich people have not: I have what even you should think is of greater value; and I give to the poor, so that I can say in the name of Jesus: *Be strong weak hands and feeble knees!*¹

89. But if you wish to be rich, be poor. If you will be poor in spirit² you will be rich in everything. It is not wealth but character³ that makes a man rich.

90. There are those who humble themselves though possessing abundant riches, and they act rightly and wisely. For the provisions of nature⁴ are sufficient wealth for anybody. As far as nature is concerned, you can quickly find what by her standards counts as abundance. But for greed⁵ even great abundance of riches seems destitution. That is why nobody is born poor, but only becomes so. Thus poverty is not a part of nature, but a matter of opinion; and that is why the rich man is easily recognised by nature, but only with difficulty greed. For the more anybody acquires, the more he thirsty he becomes, and is as it were on fire with the drunkenness of his greed.

91. Why do you seek a heap of riches as if it were indispensable? Nothing is so indispensable as to know what is not indispensable. Why do you make the flesh the scapegoat? It is not the body's stomach but greed of the mind that makes a man insatiable. Is it the flesh which has taken away hope of the future? Is it the flesh which has destroyed the sweetness of spiritual grace? Is it the flesh which has obstructed faith? Is it the flesh which has opted for the insane tyranny of empty doctrines? What the flesh much prefers is the restraint of frugality, which relieves it of a burden, clothes it in health, because it abandons worry, and assumes tranquillity.

92. But riches themselves are not censurable. *The ransom of a man's life⁶ is his wealth,⁷* since he who gives to the poor ransoms his soul. So there is scope for virtue even in these material riches. You are like helmsmen on the deep. If a man steers his ship well, he quickly crosses the straits to reach harbour. But he who does not know how to control his wealth sinks by his own weight. That is why it is written: *A rich man's wealth is his strong city.⁸*

1 Is. 35.3, but Vulg. and RSV differ both from each other, and from Ambrose's citation.

2 Cf. Mt. 5.3: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'.

3 *Animus*.

4 *Naturae lex*.

5 *Cupiditatibus*.

6 So RSV translates *anima*; Ambrose understands it as 'soul'.

7 Pr. 13.8

8 Pr. 10.15.

93. And what is that city if not Jerusalem, which is in heaven, in which is the kingdom of God?¹ That possession is good which produces everlasting rewards, that possession is good which is not left behind here, but possessed there. That possession was his who said: *The Lord is my portion*.² He does not say 'my portion is extended and dispersed as far as these boundaries'. He does not say: 'My portion lies among such and such neighbours; unless perhaps among apostles, among prophets, among the saints of the Lord'. For that is a just portion. He does not say: 'My portion is in meadows'; nor is it in forests, nor in the fields; unless perhaps in the fields of the forest in which is found the Church, of which it is written: *We found it in the fields*.³ He does not say: 'My portion is herds of horses', for *the horse is a false hope for safety*.⁴ He does not say: 'Herds of oxen, asses, or sheep are my portion', unless he includes himself in the herds which *know their owner*,⁵ and wishes to associate with that she ass which does not shun *the crib*⁶ of Christ, and unless that sheep is his portion *that is led to the slaughter*,⁷ and that lamb *that before its shearers was dumb, that did not open its mouth*,⁸ by whose humility the judgement was exalted. He says well: *before its shearers*, because on that cross He laid down what was superficial, not what was essential; for He did not lose his divinity when He put off his body.

94. So not everyone says: *The Lord is my portion*. The covetous man does not say so, because avarice steps forward and says: 'You are my portion. I have you in subjection. You have served me. You have sold yourself to me with that gold of yours. With that property of yours you have assigned yourself to me'. The dissipated man does not say: *Christ is my portion*, because dissipation steps forward and says: 'You are my portion. With that banquetting of yours I have transferred you to myself. I have caught you in the net of your feasts. I hold you forfeited to me by the bond of your gluttony. Do you not realise that you have valued your table more highly than your life? I hold you bound by your own judgement. Deny it if you can. But you cannot deny it. In sum, you have saved nothing for your life. You have spent all on the

1 Rev. 3.12, 21.2.

2 Ps. 119.57 (Vulg. 118.57).

3 Ps. 132.6 (Vulg. 131.6): 'We found it in the fields of Ja'ar'.

4 *Ad salutem*: for safety (or salvation), Ps. 33.17 (Vulg. 32.17).

5 Is. 1.3.

6 Is. 1.3.

7 Is. 53.7.

8 Is. 53.7.

table'. The adulterer cannot say: *The Lord is my portion*, because lust steps forward and says: 'I am your portion. You have consigned yourself to me with the love of that young girl; in the night with that whore you have transferred yourself into my control and jurisdiction.' The traitor does not say: *my portion is Christ*, because instantly the wickedness of his evil deed rushes at him and says: 'he has betrayed you, Lord Jesus, he is mine.'

95. We have an example of this in that when Judas had received bread from Jesus, the devil entered into his heart,¹ as if to claim his property, as if asserting the right to his portion, as if to say: 'That fellow is not yours, but mine. At any rate as my assistant, your betrayer, he obviously belongs to me. So he reclines with you, but he serves me. He celebrates with you, and he is fed with me. He receives bread from you, money from me. He drinks with you, he sells your blood to me.' Judas proved the truth of his words. Then Christ drew back from him,² and Judas himself left Jesus and followed the devil.

96. How many lords he must have who flees from the one Lord! But let us not flee from him. Who would flee from him, whose followers are bound with fetters, but are fettered willingly, and with fetters that do not bind but liberate. [These are] fetters in which the fettered glory, saying: *Paul [was] in fetters for Jesus Christ!*³ For us it is more glorious to be confined by him than to be acquitted and set free by others. Who then would flee from peace, who flee from safety, who flee from mercy, who flee from redemption?

97. You can see, my sons what has become of those who pursue these objectives, and how they have power, though dead.⁴ Let us make an effort to acquire perseverance in the pursuit of those virtues whose praise fills us with admiration; and while we acclaim them in others, may we quietly recognise them in ourselves. Nothing effeminate, nothing feeble achieves praise: *For the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and men of violence plunder it.*⁵ Our fathers ate the lamb in haste.⁶ Faith is urgent, devotion active, hope tireless. It dislikes a divided state of mind, but likes the mind to be directed from profit-

1 Jn 13.26

2 *Recessit ab eo*: this must refer to the words: 'What you are going to do now, do it quickly' (Jn 13.27–28).

3 Phil. 1.1.

4 The souls of the saved are in a position to intercede for the souls of the recently departed.

5 Mt. 11.12.

6 Ex. 12.11.

less inactivity to productive work. Why do you put it off until tomorrow? You can already gain the benefit today. You must take care in case you fail to seize the one, and then lose the other. To waste even a single hour is not insignificant, and single hours make up a life.¹

98. There are youths who are in a hurry to reach old age, so that they will no longer be subject to the decisions of their elders. There also are old men who would wish, if only they could, to return to the days of their youth. I approve of the longing of neither group. For the youths, disdainful of the present, and ungratefully, as it seems, want their life to be transformed, the old men want it to be prolonged, even though youth is quite capable of becoming old in terms of moral behaviour, and old age of becoming young again in terms of work. For it is not so much age that brings about an improvement of morals as discipline. How much more ought we to raise our hope to the kingdom of God, where there will be a renewal of life, where there will be a complete transformation not of age, but of grace.

99. It is not by inactivity, not by sleep that the reward is earned. The sleeper does no work; and no profit is earned by inactivity; quite the reverse, expenditure is incurred. Through inactivity Esau lost the primacy of the blessing,² because he chose to be given food rather than to seek it himself,³ industrious Jacob found favour⁴ with both parents.⁵

100. But Jacob, although he was superior to his brother both in virtue and in grace, yielded to Esau's wrath when the latter resented the fact that his younger brother had been preferred to him.⁶ Therefore it is written: *Leave it to the wrath!*⁷ in case another man's anger draws you too into sin, as you seek to resist him, as you seek to retaliate. If you decide to yield you can absolve both his guilt and your own. Imitate the patriarch who followed his mother's advice and made for a distant country. The advice of which mother?⁸ Of

1 Is this a Christian version of Horace, *Odes* 1.11?

2 Gen. 27.

3 Gen. 25.29–34.

4 *Gratia*, grace.

5 The contrast between the *otiosus* Esau and the *laboriosus* Jacob is misleadingly read into the biblical narrative. Esau had come back hungry from the fields when he sold his birthright for pottage. He was away hunting when Jacob cheated him of his father's first blessing. The reader of the letter in Ambrose's rendering has the opposite impression!

6 Gen. 27.41–28.5.

7 I.e. the wrath of God, Rom. 12.19.

8 I.e. what is the allegorical significance of 'mother'?

Rebecca surely, which means 'of patience'.¹ For who could have given that advice other than patience. The mother loved her son. For she would rather have him exile himself from her than from God. And because she was a good mother to both sons, she procured for the younger son the benediction which only he could retain. For she did not prefer one son to the other, but the industrious one to the idle, the one filled with faith to the one who had none. And by loving the younger son she conferred no small benefit on the elder, she prevented him from killing his brother.²

101. Therefore because he was living exiled from his parents because of his piety, and not because of his wickedness, he could speak with God, and he prospered in wealth, in children and in grace. And yet when he met his brother he had not been made arrogant by these things, but humbling himself he bowed to him, not to the harsh, madly raging, ignoble fellow that was his brother,³ but to Him whom he saw⁴ in his brother.⁵ So he bowed to him seven times, the number of forgiveness, because he was not bowing to a man, but to God, foreseeing in spirit his coming in the flesh to *take away the sins of the world*.⁶ The mysterious meaning of this is disclosed to you in the reply of Peter: *If my brother shall sin against me, how often shall I forgive him? As many as seven times?*⁷ So you see that the act of forgiving sinners is a type of the Great Sabbath, of that peace of everlasting grace, and therefore it is bestowed in contemplation.⁸

102. But what does it mean that he arranged his wives and children and all his people in order and instructed them too to bow down to earth?⁹ They were surely not bowing to the earth as to the element which is frequently soaked with blood, which is where wickedness is devised, and which often looks wild, with vast rocks¹⁰ or steep cliffs or sterile and starving soil, but rather as to [a type of] that flesh which will be our shield. And perhaps this

1 Patience in the abstract, which is Jerome's interpretation of the meaning of Rebecca (Jerome, *Lib. Int. Hebr. nom.* 70.23).

2 *Parricidium*, lit. 'kin-killing'. See Gen. 27.41.

3 The derogatory epithets are not justified by Esau's behaviour in the biblical narrative.

4 Cf. Gen. 33.10.

5 Gen. 33.1–7.

6 Jn 1.29.

7 Mt. 18.21.

8 *Et ideo contemplatione donatur*: in heaven, on the great Sabbath, all discord is at an end; we attain this in this world by contemplating it.

9 Gen. 33.

10 *Horret cautibus*; cf. Virg. *Aen.* 4.366.

is the mystery that the Lord taught you when he said: *I do not say to you seven times, but even seventy seven times.*¹

103. You too therefore must forgive wrongs done to yourselves² so that you may become children of Jacob. Do not let yourselves be provoked, like Esau. Imitate the saintly David who like the good teacher that he was left us an example to imitate, saying: *In return for their loving me they reproached me, but I prayed for them,*³ and when he was being abused he kept praying. Prayer is a good shield, by which insult is excluded, curses are repelled, and frequently hurled back at the cursers, so that they are wounded by their own missile. *Let them curse*, he says, *but do you bless!*⁴ Execration by men is to be invited, for it attracts the blessing of the Lord.

104. As for the rest, my most dearly beloved, bearing in mind that Jesus suffered outside the gate,⁵ do you too leave this earthly city; for your city, Jerusalem, is in heaven. Dwell there, so that you can say: *But our dwelling is in heaven.*⁶ Jesus went out of the city in order that you, when you go out of this world, may be above the world. Moses, who alone saw God, had the tabernacle outside the camp, when he was speaking with God,⁷ and while the blood of the victims offered for sin was taken to the altars, their bodies were burnt outside the camp.⁸ For no man can rid himself of sin, as long as he dwells among the vices of this world, nor is his blood acceptable to God, unless he departs from the pollution of his body.

105. Cherish hospitality, through which the holy Abraham found grace. He offered hospitality to Christ, and Sara acquired the merit to bear a son though already worn with age.⁹ Lot escaped by the same means from the destruction of Sodom by fire.¹⁰ And you too can entertain angels, if you offer strangers hospitality. What am I to say about Raab, who found salvation by offering that same service?¹¹

1 Mt. 18.22. Jacob had eleven sons (Gen. 49). Ambrose assumes that each son bowed down seven times (Gen. 33.3), making 77 bows in all.

2 Cf. Col. 3.13.

3 Ps. 109.4 (Vulg. 108.4). Ambrose cites the Greek Septuagint. The Hebrew text and RSV read 'in return for my loving them'.

4 Ps. 109.28 (Vulg. 108.28).

5 Hebr. 13.12.

6 Phil. 3.20.

7 Ex. 33.7.

8 Ex. 29.14.

9 Gen. 18.3ff.

10 Gen. 19.1–28.

11 Jos. 2.1–21, 6.22–25.

106. Have compassion with those that are bound with chains as if you were yourselves bound with them. Console the mourning: *for it is better to enter a house of grief than a house of rejoicing.*¹ In the first case the merit of a good deed is recorded, in the second the sin of a transgression. For the one you hope to get a reward hereafter, for the other you have received it already. Sympathise with those who are afflicted, as if you were afflicted with them.

107. A woman is to defer to her husband, not be a slave to him, to allow herself to be ruled, but not to be coerced by him. A woman who is fit for quarrels is not fit for marriage. Let a husband guide his wife as the steersman his ship, honour her as the partner of his life, take a share with her as co-heir of grace.

108. Mothers, wean your children, love them, and pray for them, that they may live long above this earth, not on this earth but above the earth! For nothing on this earth is long-lived, and what seems a long existence is really short and quite precarious. Teach them that they should take up the cross of the Lord, rather than love this life.

109. Mary, the mother of the Lord was standing in front of her son's cross; only saint John the evangelist has taught me this.² Others have written that at the passion of the Lord the world was shaken, the sky covered with darkness, the sun hid, and after he had made a confession of faith, a thief was received into paradise.³ John has taught us what the others omitted, how Jesus from the cross called his mother, thinking it more important that at the moment of victory over his sufferings, he was fulfilling the duties of love to his mother, than that he was making a gift of the kingdom of heaven.⁴ For if it is a religious act to pardon a thief, much richer piety is shown when a son honours his mother with so great affection: *Behold*, he said, *your son, behold your mother.*⁵ Christ gave witness from the cross, and he shared out the duties of love between his mother and his disciple. The Lord made not only a public testament, but also a private one, and that testament of his was signed by John, a witness worthy of so great a testator. A good testament, bequeathing not money, but eternal life, one not written in ink but in the living spirit of God: *My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.*⁶

1 Cf. Ec. 7.3.

2 Jn 19.25

3 Lk. 23.39–45; cf. Mt. 27.45–52.

4 Jn 19.27ff.

5 Jn 19.26–27.

6 Ps. 45.2 (Vulg. 44.2).

110. Nor did Mary's bearing fall below what befitted the mother of Christ. After the apostles had fled she remained standing in front of the cross, looking with pious eyes at the wounds of her son; for she was awaiting not the death of her dear one, but the salvation of the world, or perhaps because she, being as it were his royal palace,¹ had already learnt of the redemption of the world through the death of her son, thought that she herself by her own death would make some addition to his public service. But Jesus did not need a helper for the redemption of all, because he had saved all without a helper. That is why he also says: *I have become as a man without help, free among the dead.*² He received the love of his parent, but he did not seek the assistance of another.

111. Holy mothers, imitate her who in her one and dearly beloved son set so great an example of maternal virtue. For neither can the children you have be dearer to you (than He was to her), nor did that virgin seek the consolation that she could give birth to another son.

112. Masters when you command your slaves³ do not treat them as persons of inferior condition, but remember that you and they are partakers⁴ of the same nature. You too, slaves, serve your masters with good will! For everyone ought to bear with patience the condition into which he was born, and obey not only good, but also harsh masters.⁵ For what merit is there in your slavery if you serve good masters diligently? But to serve even harsh masters diligently would be meritorious. For the freeborn too gain no reward if they are punished by judges when guilty, but they do gain that reward if they are punished though innocent. And so you too will have your reward, if by fixing your minds on the Lord Jesus you succeed in serving even difficult masters with patience. For the Lord himself suffered, the just at the hand of the unjust, and with marvellous patience nailed our sins to his cross, that whoever should imitate him, might wash away his sins with His blood.

113. To conclude, you must all turn all to the Lord Jesus! May you have enjoyment of this life with a good conscience, patience in the face of death through the hope of immortality, assurance of resurrection through the grace

1 *Aula regalis*, because her womb had been his residence.

2 Ps. 88.5 (Vulg. 87.5).

3 RSV of 1 Petr. 18 translates *servi* 'servants', as do Wood and Walford 1881, but the contrasting *liberi* / freeborn a few lines later shows that up to then Ambrose has been addressing slaves.

4 Cf. 2 Petr. 1.4.

5 Cf. 2 Petr. 2.18.

of Christ, truth with innocence, truth with trust, abstinence with holiness, industry with sobriety, sociability with self-restraint, learning without vanity, the sobriety of the truthful teaching, without the inebriation of heresy.

THE LETTER OF POPE SIRICIUS
***EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM* (MAUR. 41A)¹**

As we have seen, Jovinianus' criticism of ascetic ideals had a considerable impact.² According to Augustine 'the heresy of Jovinianus in equating the merit of consecrated virgins with conjugal chastity gained such wide currency in the city of Rome that quite a number of nuns whose chastity had earlier not been under suspicion are said to have withdrawn into marriage.'³ In this letter Pope Siricius reports that he has excommunicated the monk Jovinianus, and certain of his followers who have left Rome for Milan, and asks Ambrose and other northern bishops to support the excommunication. Ambrose thereupon held a small council at Milan, which repeated the excommunication. Ambrose informs the pope of this decision in *Ep. ex. 15*, and at the same time produces a number of arguments of his own to refute the heresy.

It is worth noting that in the second group of letters *extra collectionem* no fewer than half (nos. 14, *Ep. Sir. 15*) relate to Jovinianus. In fact they form a dossier, though the three letters are not assembled in chronological order. *Ep. ex. 14* was written in 396, while the letter of Siricius and the reply to it, *Ep. ex. 15*, were written in 392. In the *Collection* itself only *Ep. 71* is concerned with Jovinianus, though indirectly: Jovinianus' name is not mentioned, but the letter deals with the case of Bishop Bonosus, who insisted that the Virgin Mary had given birth to children after Jesus,⁴ which is one of Jovinianus' doctrines.

It might be thought that the letter of Siricius and *Ep. ex. 15*, which answers it, were written in connection with the same council as *Ep. 71*, that is the council of Capua. But the names of bishops who signed *Ep. ex. 15*⁵ show that

¹ It has been transmitted in several manuscripts of the second group of letters *extra collectionem*, and is included in Zelzer's edition *CSEL LXXXII.X.3*, 296–301, but has not been numbered by Zelzer.

² On Jovinianus see also above pp. 292–94.

³ Augustine, *Reconsiderations (Retractationes)* 2.22, cited (with translation) in P. G. Walsh 2001, 149.

⁴ *Ep. 71.3*.

⁵ See below p. 345.

theirs was a synod of northern bishops, closely associated with Ambrose, and presumably meeting at Milan; while the council of Capua was, if only in theory, a general council. Moreover *Ep.* 71 does not name Jovinianus, or mention that he had been condemned. So the council of Capua of spring 392 or not much later¹ was earlier than the council addressed by Siricius in this letter. This council of Milan will have met late in 392 or more likely in 393.²

TRANSLATION

<Siricius to a number of bishops>

1. I would always wish, most beloved brethren, to report joyful news of love and peace to your sincerity, so that the exchange of letters between us might be cheered by the confirmation of our security. But because the ancient enemy will not allow us to live at peace and exempt from his attack, being a liar from the beginning, an enemy to truth, envious of mankind, whom to deceive he previously deceived himself, a foe of chastity, a teacher of dissipation, he feeds on cruelty, he hates those who punish themselves by abstinence, while he tells his agents,³ as they preach, that fasting is unnecessary. Since he has no hope of things to come, he echoes the advice of the Apostle (for one in that situation): *Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.*⁴

2. O unhappy presumption! O cunning of a mind without hope! The discourse of heretics was creeping within the Church still unrecognised like a cancer, its purpose being to fill the breast, and so to bring about the rapid death of the entire man. And if the Lord of Hosts had not torn apart the snare, which the devil had prepared, the mounting of this performance, involving so much evil and hypocrisy, would have dragged many simple hearts to destruction. For the human mind is easily led astray to follow the worse course, seeing that it would rather flit widely than journey with pain along the narrow way.

3. It was therefore very necessary, most beloved, to convey to your knowledge and consideration what has been happening here, in case any bishop's ignorance might result in the Church becoming infected by the pollution of

1 See Palanque 1933, 254–63, and Introduction to *Epp.* 70 and 71 above p. 49.

2 See Pietri 1976, vol. 2, 900–05.

3 That is Jovinianus and his followers.

4 1. Cor. 15.32. The full sentence of Paul which is implied, though not fully quoted, is: 'If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'

some extremely wicked men who have broken into it on the pretext of religion, as it is written in the Lord's words: *Many will come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruit.*¹ These are they who for reasons of advantage display themselves as Christians, so that walking under the cover of a pious name, they can enter the house of prayer, and pour out the discourse of their insidious propositions *to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart*,² and turning them away from catholic truth, win them over, as the devil does, to the madness of their doctrine, deceiving the artless minds of the flock.

4. We have indeed heard about, or learnt through our own experience, the evil of many heresies from the time of the apostles up to now, but never before has the mystery of the Church been harassed by the barking of such dogs as these enemies of the faith, who have now suddenly burst forth with their doctrine of unbelief fully grown, and who *by the fruit*³ of their words betray whose disciples they are.⁴ For while other heretics have presumed to extract and remove from the divine teachings single aspects of our faith which they fail to understand, these men, *not having on a wedding garment*,⁵ are doing damage to Catholics by perverting, as I have said, the self-discipline of both the New Testament and the Old, and interpreting them in a diabolical spirit. They have already begun to use their alluring but false discourse to ruin a considerable number of Christians, and to make them associates in their madness. They have not⁶ kept the poison of their iniquity to themselves, but as if they were the elect,⁷ they have publicly revealed their blasphemies in an impudent pamphlet,⁸ and driven by the madness of a desperate mind, they have published them far and wide to win the applause of the heathens.

5. The horrifying document was unexpectedly presented to my humble self by certain Christians, men strong in faith, of excellent birth, and outstanding in piety,⁹ so that a spiritual doctrine contrary to divine law might

1 Mt. 7.15.

2 Ps. 11.3 (Vulg. 10.3).

3 Lk. 6.44; Mt. 8.20.

4 Disciples of the devil's.

5 Mt. 22.12, i.e. they have no place in the Church at all they have not been chosen, according to Mt. 22.14: 'Many are called but few are chosen'.

6 *Non* is not in Zelzer's text, but surely needed.

7 *Electi* echoes 'the chosen', of Mt 22.14. Jovinianus and followers are behaving as if they were chosen, which they are not.

8 Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.3 lists four principal doctrines expounded in the document.

9 Led by Jerome's friend and patron Pammachius.

be exposed by an episcopal verdict and destroyed. Whenever we officiate with the veil,¹ we certainly do not receive the marriage vows with disdain, but we give greater honour to virgins devoted to God, who are the outcome of marriage.

6. It has therefore been established at a meeting of clergy that the doctrine (of the document) contravenes our doctrine, that is Christian law. And so following the precept of the Apostle,² we decided that those preaching a doctrine other than the one we have received – take note that this was the unanimous verdict of all of us, both presbyters and deacons and of the entire clergy – namely that Jovinianus, Auxentius, Genialis, Germinator, Felix, Plotinus, Marcianus, Januarius and Ingeniosus, having been found to be the originators of the new heresy and blasphemy, and having been found guilty by divine sentence and by our verdict, are to remain for ever excluded from the church.

7. Being in no doubt that your Holiness will observe this judgement, I have sent you this missive by my brethren and fellow-priests Crescens, Leopardus and Alexander, so that they can perform this religious duty for the faith with a fervent spirit.

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 15 (MAUR. 42)*

This letter was written in 393 in reply to Pope Siricius' letter (Maur. 41a). Siricius had informed Ambrose that he had excommunicated Jovinianus and followers. Ambrose thereupon assembled a council of northern bishops at Milan, and wrote *Ep. ex. 15* in the name of the assembled bishops, adding their sentence of excommunication to that of Siricius. Of the nine bishops who signed the letter, Eventius was bishop of Pavia (Ticinum), Maximus of Ljubljana (Emona), Felix of Como (Comum), Bassianus of Lodi (Laus), Theodulus of Martigny (Octodurum), Geminianus of Modena (Mutina), Eustasius of Tortona (Dertona), Constantius of Imola (Forum Cornelli) and Sabinus of Piacenza (Placentia). The majority of names represent bishops from northern Italy. It has been suggested that Ambrose wrote *Ep. 71*, dealing with the case of Bishop Bonosus, in the name of the

¹ In *Ep. 62.7* Ambrose describes the bride's veil as the 'priestly veil'. The priest veiled the bride in the marriage service.

² Gal. 1.8.

same synod.¹ But the synod in whose name *Ep. 71* was sent was almost certainly not the synod of *Ep. ex. 15*.²

The letter shows that Ambrose by this time had achieved a position almost parallel to that of Siricius at Rome, or rather it illustrates how Ambrose used the role of intermediary between the Pope and the bishops of northern Italy to enhance his regional authority.³

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA EXTRA COLLECTIONEM 15*

To their Lord and dearly beloved brother Siricius, Ambrose, Sabinus,⁴ Bassianus and the others.

1. In the letter of your Holiness we recognise the watchfulness of the good shepherd, for you defend the door⁵ that has been entrusted to you with diligence and safeguard the sheepfold of Christ with pious solicitude, and are worthy of the attention and obedience of the sheep of the Lord. And so since you know the lambs of Christ, you easily spot the wolves,⁶ and go out to meet them, like a vigilant shepherd, so that they do not scatter the Lord's fold with the bites⁷ of their treachery and their deadly bark.⁸

2. We praise you for this, our lord and most beloved brother, and we make it known with heartfelt support, and we are not surprised that the flock of the Lord was horrified at the frenzy of the wolves in whom they could not recognise the voice of Christ. For it is savage barking not to show exceptional favour to virginity, nor a special rank to chastity; to wish to confuse all things indiscriminately, to abolish different degrees of merit,⁹ and to reduce to a kind of poverty the rewards awarded by heaven, as if Christ had

1 Zelzer *CSEL* 82.10.iii, cxxviii.

2 See the Introduction to the letter of Siricius pp. 336–37 above.

3 See McLynn 1994, 280–81; Humphries 1999, 19–58; Lizzi 1990, 156–73.

4 Sabinus was bishop of Piacenza, and received several letters from Ambrose. Bassianus was bishop of Lodi.

5 Cf. Jn 10.7

6 Siricius in his letter had quoted Mt. 7.15. The metaphor is taken up in the reply.

7 Translating Zelzer's *morsibus* (bites) instead of the old reading *moribus* (manners).

8 The 'bark' is a metaphor taken up from Siricius' letter (c. 4), though there it is the bark of dogs.

9 Cf. the attack in Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 2.19.

only one palm to award and not a rich abundance of entitlements to rewards.¹

3. These people pretend that they honour marriage. But how can marriage receive praise if glory is refused to virginity? We certainly do not deny that marriage was sanctified by Christ, for the divine voice said: *the two shall be in one flesh*² and one spirit. But we were born, before we were made (one),³ and the mystery of the divine work is far more excellent than the remedy of human weakness.⁴ It is right that a good wife is praised, but it is better for a pious virgin to be given preference, as the apostle says: *he that gives his virgin in marriage does well, but he who does not give her does better. The latter cares about the things of God, the former about the things of the world.*⁵ One is bound by the chains of marriage, the other is free of chains. The one is under the Law, the other under grace. Marriage is good because it was devised as a means of propagating succeeding generations, but virginity is better since through it the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom is acquired, and the way to heavenly rewards discovered. Through a woman care came into the world, through a virgin salvation came about. Finally, Christ chose virginity as the special gift to be given to himself, and he made manifest the role of virginity, and he displayed in himself that which he had chosen in his mother.

4. What madness of deadly barking is it that the same people, who say that Christ could not have been engendered by a virgin, also assert that among women after giving birth to human offspring virgins remain? Does Christ therefore grant to others what he could not, according to them, grant to himself? But if he took on flesh, and if he was made man in order redeem man, and to rescue man from death, being God, he nevertheless appeared on earth by means of an exceptional favour,⁶ so that in accordance with his saying: *behold, I make all things new,*⁷ he was born by delivery from an immaculate

1 Jovinianus denied that virginity ranked above marriage, as explained by Pope Siricius in his letter (c. 5). This is rhetorically generalised here.

2 Mt. 19.5

3 'One' is not in the text, but the following clause shows that the antithesis is between the 'mystery of divine work' (i.e. the creation or birth) and the married state (the remedy of human weakness).

4 Cf. 1 Cor. 7.9.

5 1 Cor. 7.38 and 7.34.

6 *Munere*.

7 Is. 43.19.

virgin, and, as it is written, he was believed to be *God is with us*.¹ But continuing on their perverse way they say: a virgin conceived, but a virgin did not give birth. So they maintain that she who was able to conceive as a virgin could not give birth as a virgin, even though invariably conception precedes, and birth follows.

5. But if they will not believe the teachings of bishops,² let them believe the oracles of Christ, let them believe the counsel of angels saying, *for with God no word is impossible*,³ let them believe the creed of the apostles which the Roman church has always guarded and preserves uncontaminated. Mary heard the voice of the angel, and she who had previously asked: *how can this be?* did not question belief in the truth of the birth any further, and replied: *behold the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word*.⁴ This is the virgin that conceived in her womb, the virgin who gave birth to a son; for so it is written: *Behold a virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son*.⁵ For the prophet not only says that a virgin shall conceive in her womb, but also that a virgin will give birth.

6. But what is that gate of the sanctuary, that outer gate towards the east, which remains *shut, and nobody* – the prophet says – *shall pass through it, but only the God of Israel shall pass through it*?⁶ Surely this gate is Mary, the gate through which the Saviour has entered the world. This is the gate of righteousness,⁷ as he himself said: *allow us to fulfil all righteousness*.⁸ This gate is Mary, of which it is written that the Lord will pass through it; and it will be shut after the birth, because it was as a virgin that she both conceived and gave birth.

7. But why is it incredible if contrary to the law of her natural origin Mary both gave birth and remained a virgin, when contrary to the laws of nature *the sea saw and fled and the currents of Jordan turned back to their source*?⁹ Hence it does not pass belief that a virgin gave birth when we also read that a rock vomited water,¹⁰ and a wave of the sea solidified in to a kind

1 Mt. 1.24, i.e. Emanuel.

2 *Sacerdotum*.

3 Lk. 1.37 (Vulg.).

4 Lk. 38.

5 Is. 7.14.

6 Ezek. 44.2.

7 *Iustitiae*.

8 Mt. 3.15.

9 Ps. 114.3 (Vulg. 113.3).

10 Ex. 17.6.

of wall.¹ It does not pass belief that a man issued from a virgin, seeing that a rock let an abundant spring bubble forth, iron floated on water,² a man walked on water.³ So, if a wave could carry a man, could not a virgin have given birth to a man? But what man? The one about whom we read: *and the Lord will send them a Man who shall save them, and the Lord shall be known in Egypt.*⁴ In the Old Testament a Hebrew virgin led an army through the sea.⁵ In the New Testament a virgin was chosen to be the heavenly hall of a king, for our salvation.

8. What else? Let us also add a celebration of widowhood, since in the gospel narrative after that most illustrious delivery of the Virgin, Anna a widow is introduced, who had lived with her husband for seven years from her virginity, and was now a widow of eighty-four years of age who did not depart from the temple, but served with fasting and prayers, day and night.⁶

9. And it is only right that these people should despise widowhood, a condition which is given to abstinence. For they feel sorry that they have once have grown lean from this discipline, and they are now making up for the wrong they did to themselves then; and by daily banquets, and a life of luxury, they strive to banish the pain of abstinence. Nothing becomes them better than the fact that they condemn themselves out of their own mouths.

10. But let them fear God, in case even that fasting of theirs is held against them. They must choose what they want. If they have ever fasted,⁷ let them observe penitence on account of their good deed, if never, let them confess their intemperance and luxury.⁸ And the same people say that Paul had been a teacher of excess.⁹ But who then is a teacher of sobriety, if Paul is to

1 Ex. 14.22

2 2 Kg. 6.6.

3 Mt. 14.26.

4 Is. 19.20–21 condensed with some verbal difference from Vulg.

5 Ex. 15.20.

6 Lk. 2.36–37.

7 Jovinianus had once been a monk and rigorous ascetic: see Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.40; 2.21, 36.

8 As a monk Jovinianus was used to the discipline of fasting. Now he is teaching that it is not fasting that is meritorious, but its opposite, the enjoying of God's gifts. Ambrose pretends to think that Jovinianus has actually condemned fasting as sinful, and ironically suggests that he should therefore do penance for having fasted in the past, but if he has never fasted there is no reason why he should not let people know that he is living a life of pleasure.

9 According to Jerome, Jovinianus cited 1 Tim. 4.3–5: 'They forbid marriage and inculcate abstinence from certain foods, though God created them to be enjoyed with thanksgiving by believers'.

be considered a teacher of excess, Paul who castigated his own body, and brought it into subjection¹ and who has recorded that it was with numerous fasts² that he offered the worship which he owed to Christ? And he did this not to show off his own piety, but to teach us what to imitate. So did he really teach excess who says *Why do you make rules as if you still belonged to this world;*³ *do not handle, do not touch, do not taste things which are all perishable; who says: that we are to live not for the indulgence of the body, not for any honour satisfying and flattering the flesh,*⁴ *not for the lusts of error*⁵ *but for the Spirit by which we are made new?*⁶

11. If what the apostle says is not enough, let them listen to the prophet speaking: *and I shield my soul with fasting.*⁷ So one who does not fast is exposed and naked and vulnerable. So if Adam had shielded himself with fasting he would not have been found to be naked. Nineveh saved itself from death by fasting, and the Lord himself said: *this kind you can only cast out by prayer and fasting.*⁸

12. But what need for more words from our master and teacher? They have already paid the price they deserve for their unbelief; they who came here just so that that there might be no place left in which they were not condemned,⁹ they who have indeed shown themselves to be Manichees by their belief that Christ did not come forth from a virgin.¹⁰ What kind of madness is this, which closely resembles that of the modern Jews? If it is believed that He did not come, and that He did not take on flesh, then He appeared to us as a mere phantom, and was crucified as a phantom. But He was crucified in truth and for us, and in truth He is our redeemer.

13. A Manichee is someone who denies the truth, who denies the incarnation of Christ, and therefore these men do not have their sins forgiven, but share the impiety of the Manichees, which our most clement emperor too

1 Argued on basis of 1 Cor. 9.27.

2 2 Cor. 6.5.

3 Col. 2.2.

4 Col. 2.23.

5 Eph. 4.22.

6 Cf. Eph. 33.

7 Ps. 69.10 (Vulg. 68.11) with *flevi* (I wept) instead of *cooperui* (I sheltered).

8 Mt. 17.20 (Vulg.), only in footnote of RSV.

9 Jovinianus and his companions seem to have come to Milan after they had been condemned at Rome, perhaps hoping for sympathy from Ambrose

10 According to Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.3, Jovinianus had claimed that the denigration of sex was implicitly Manichee.

has execrated.¹ And all who see them flee from them as from some infection, as can be testified by our brothers and fellow-priests Crescens, Leopardus and Alexander,² who (as they departed) left these people condemned by the curses of all, practically banished from the city of Milan.

14. Therefore take cognisance that Iovinianus, Auxentius, Germinator, Felix, Plotinus, Genialis, Marcianus, Ianuarius and Ingeniosus whom your holiness has condemned, in accordance with your judgement, have been condemned by us also.

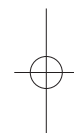
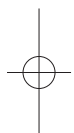
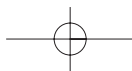
May our almighty God keep you our most beloved lord and brother, safe and prosperous.

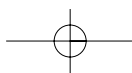
Also the subscription: I Eventius, bishop, greet your Holiness in the Lord and sign the letter; Maximus, bishop; Felix, bishop; Bassianus, bishop; Theodolus, bishop; by order of the bishop Geminianus, himself present at the meeting, I the presbyter Aper have signed; Eustasius, bishop; Constantius, bishop; Sabinus bishop. All signed in that order.³

1 *CTh* 16.5.7 (381); 9.1 (382); 18 (389).

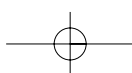
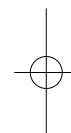
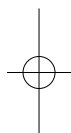
2 These three priests probably carried the letter, just as they had brought the letter of the Roman bishop to the council.

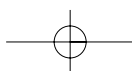
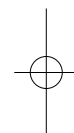
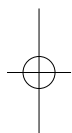
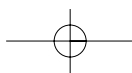
3 Accepting Zelzer's *ordine*/'in order'. The text translated by Wood and Alford and by Beyenka read *ordines*/'orders'.





APPENDICES





APPENDIX I

AMBROSE AND MAGNUS MAXIMUS

INTRODUCTION TO *EPISTULA* 30 (MAUR. 24)

This letter (published in Book VI of the *Collected Letters*) was written after Ambrose's second embassy to the usurper Maximus, but the date of this embassy is uncertain. The only indication is the likely reference to the execution of Priscillian and his followers in par. 12 of the letter. But the date of this is itself uncertain. Prosper's *Chronicle*¹ dates it to 385, and the *Chronicle of Hydatius* to 387.² Palanque³ and Chadwick⁴ argue in favour of the later date, Zelzer following Rauschen⁵ favours 384/5. So, more recently, do Barnes⁶ and Dörner.⁷

As far as the biography of Ambrose is concerned the early date would put the embassy before the conflict between Ambrose and the empress Justina of 385–86. The later date would put it after the conflict. If the court felt that it needed Ambrose in summer 386 to send the formidable Nicene bishop as ambassador to the Nicene⁸ Maximus this would provide an explanation of the fact that it yielded to Ambrose's intransigence in the matter of the basilica. So a convincing historical reconstruction can be built around the later date.⁹ But this does not prove that it is correct.

1 *Chronica Minora*, ed. Th. Mommsen, Berlin 1892, repr. Munich 1981, I. 462 and 646

2 *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, ed. R. W. Burgess, Oxford 1993, 76.

3 *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain*, Paris 1933, 516–18.

4 *Priscillian of Avilla*, Oxford 1976, 137.

5 *Jahrbücher der christlichen Kirche unter Theodosius dem Grossen*, Freiburg 1897, 222–24

6 T. D. Barnes, 'Ambrose and the basilicas of Milan in 385 and 386', *ZAC* 4 (2000), 282–99, esp. 295.

7 Dörner 2001, 217–44, 237–42. The fact that so much of the detail of the letter is concerned with events of 383 clearly favours the early date, though not conclusively.

8 Maximus had written a letter to Valentinian in spring 386 in favour of the Nicene position, *Coll. Avell.* 39.

9 See McLynn 1994, 217–19, and the Introduction above p. 16.

But what makes this letter important in any discussion of the character of Ambrose's *Collection* is the fact that it raises the question of whether it is really the document it purports to be, that is, whether the letter as we have it in the *Collection* is indeed the letter that Ambrose wrote to Valentinian II to report on his embassy to Maximus. For I find it very difficult to believe that, if Ambrose wrote a report of his embassy, he could possibly have written anything like this letter, or indeed that the opening interview between Maximus and Ambrose could have been anything like the interview described in the letter. What Valentinian must have wanted to hear was an account of the recent negotiations between his ambassador and the usurper. The conversation reported in the letter is, however, essentially about Ambrose's previous mission in 383, not about the present one. It is a kind of apology for Ambrose's behaviour then, though not quite a straightforward apology either. But at the real interview the conversation must have been about the present, and Valentinian will have required to know how Ambrose's mission had affected his (i.e. Valentinian's) relations with Maximus. Moreover we know that while Ambrose was extremely outspoken when he felt that he needed to be, he was also a very skilful diplomat, quite capable of dressing controversial matter in diplomatic language.¹ It is unthinkable that he was as gratuitously rude to Maximus as he professes to have been.

Against this, Dörner in his carefully argued article has tried to provide a context in which the letter could have been a true and relevant account of Ambrose's second embassy to Trier. His argument is that Ambrose's conduct of the first embassy – the principal subject matter of the letter – was in fact also a principal issue for the second, in that Maximus had complained about Ambrose's hostile conduct during the embassy and since, and that this grievance of Maximus had become an important cause of friction between the courts of Milan and Trier. Ambrose was sent to Trier to remove the friction, by convincing Maximus that his complaints were groundless.² But this is extremely unlikely. If Ambrose had indeed misled Maximus in 383, and so made him miss a good opportunity to invade Italy, something which Ambrose may well have done, this was past history and irreversible, not a matter for diplomatic negotiations.

1 Not least in the letter about the massacre at Thessalonica *Ep. ex.* 11.

2 Focusing on the lines 'Among the reasons why I have come is that you used to claim that while you trusted me on my first embassy ... you were deceived by me' (c. 5), Dörner argues that there is only one possible interpretation of this sentence, namely 'that the complaints of Maximus were known in Milan ... and that they were the decisive reason why Ambrose took it upon himself to travel to Trier a second time' (Dörner 2001, 229).

In my opinion the letter does not make sense in any diplomatic context that I can imagine. It does, however, make perfect sense in a context of personal apologetic and self-presentation. It demonstrates that at the time when Maximus had usurped power in the western provinces, and was threatening to take over Italy also, Ambrose had been strongly on the side of the legitimate emperor and against the usurper. It also recalls, if in rather an oblique way, one of Ambrose's most extraordinary achievements, how he saved Valentinian II from having to face an invasion which he did not have the military strength to resist, an episode which would be unknown to us but for this letter. There is also a sentence which carries the suggestion that even at that time Ambrose already thought that Theodosius, the emperor of the East, was the true patron of the Western court.¹

It is not suggested that the letter is a total falsification. The claim that the letter was actually sent to the emperor in the form in which we have it, and that it provides a true report of a conversation between Maximus and Ambrose, must to my mind be rejected, but much of the historical detail providing a context for the conversation or alluded to in the course of the conversation may well be basically correct. The supposed letter is in a sense a rhetorical reconstruction like Libanius' addresses to Theodosius after the Riot of the Statues, which misleadingly purport to have been spoken by Libanius in the presence of Theodosius at Constantinople,² but nevertheless seem to give a more or less true account of the events of the riot. The question is why Ambrose composed the letter in the way he did. Paulinus' *Life of Ambrose* may provide a hint, when he refers his readers to precisely this letter for evidence of how firmly Ambrose had opposed the usurper Maximus.³ It may well be that Ambrose composed the letter, or perhaps only rewrote a letter he had actually sent to Valentinian II, so that it might be included in the *Collection*, to be found and cited by future historians or biographers to make exactly this point.⁴ In any case the letter commemorates Ambrose's two embassies, which were among the most extraordinary episodes of his eventful life. But the letter could also have had a more immediate use. It shows Ambrose to have been strongly and fearlessly opposed to the usurper Maximus, which was worth publicising after Theodosius had defeated and killed Maximus in summer 388.

1 c. 11

2 Libanius, *Or.* 19 and 20.

3 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 19.

4 Cf. *Ep. ex.* 10, which can be argued to have been similarly composed, or at least edited, to justify Ambrose's conduct during the usurpation of Eugenius. See above p. 256.

TRANSLATION OF *EPISTULA* 30 (MAUR. 24)

Ambrose to the emperor Valentinian.

1. Although you were so certain of the loyalty of my previous embassy¹ that no account was then required from me, the fact that I was held in the Gallic provinces for a considerable number of days made it sufficiently clear that I did not comply with the wishes of Maximus, and that I did not consent to any measures that furthered his purposes rather than peace. Furthermore you would not have entrusted me with a second embassy unless you had approved of the first. Yet because when I came to him once more he put me under the necessity of confronting him in a dispute, I thought that I needed to forward a report of my embassy, in case somebody's talk should put together a mixture of empty falsehoods,² before my return could set a seal on the manifest, complete and unvarnished demonstration of the truth.

2. On the following day after I had arrived at Trier, I made my way to the palace. There came to meet me a man, Gallicanus,³ a chamberlain,⁴ an imperial eunuch. I requested an audience. He asked whether I had a commission from your Clemency. I replied that I had. He rejoined that I could not be received except in the consistory. I said that this was not customary for a bishop, and in any case there were certain matters on which I needed to have a serious conversation with his prince.⁵ In brief, he consulted Maximus, but felt obliged to return the same answer, so that it was clear that the first reply too reflected a decision of Maximus. So I said that the procedure was certainly inconsistent with my office,⁶ but I would not shrink from the duty I had undertaken. Humility was dear to me, especially on your behalf, and on a mission of fraternal piety.

3. When he [Maximus] had taken his seat in the consistory, I entered. He rose to give me the [ceremonial] kiss. I stood among the members of the consistory. The others began to encourage me to go up, he to invite me. I

1 After the murder of Gratian on 25 August 383. For circumstances see McLynn 1994, 160–63. Its purpose seems to have been essentially to forestall an immediate attack on Valentinian by Maximus.

2 *Vana... veri*, 'empty of truth', an allusion to Virg. *Aen.* 10.630.

3 Zelzer took Gallicanus to be the man's name, but it could mean 'Gallic', that the man was a Gaul.

4 *Praepositum sacri cubiculi*.

5 *Princeps*.

6 *Munus*.

replied: 'Why do you kiss someone whom you do not acknowledge? For if you had acknowledged me you would not be seeing me in this place.' He said: 'Bishop, you are upset'. 'Not by an insult', I replied, 'but from embarrassment, because I am standing in a place where I do not belong'. 'And yet', he said, 'you came into the consistory during your first embassy'. 'That too was no fault of mine', I replied, 'the one who summoned, not the one who came, committed the infringement'. 'Why then did you come?' he asked. 'Because on that occasion I was seeking peace for one inferior to you, now for your equal'. 'Equal, thanks to whom?' he asked. 'Thanks to almighty God', I replied, 'who preserved for Valentinian the empire which he had given him.'¹

4. Finally he burst out, saying: 'You have deceived me! As has that fellow Bauto² who wished to claim the Empire for himself using the boy as a figurehead, who even roused barbarians against me, as if I myself had no men to lead into the field, seeing that so many thousands of barbarians serve me, and draw their pay from me.'³ What would have happened, if I had not been held back, last time you came here? Who could have resisted me, and my courage?'

5. To this I replied, gently: 'There is no need', I said, 'to upset yourself, as there is no reason to be upset. But hear patiently what is said in reply to those words of yours. Among the reasons why I have come is that you used to claim that while you trusted me on my first embassy, you were deceived by me. Something I might boast to have done for the safety of an emperor who was an orphan! For whom are we bishops under a greater obligation to protect than orphans? For it is written: *Uphold justice for the fatherless, plead for the widow, rescue the wronged*,⁴ and elsewhere 'judges of widows, fathers of orphans.'⁵

6. I will not, however, make a fuss about the service I did to Valentinian. To be frank, when did I obstruct your legions, so as to stop you from flooding into Italy? What rocks did I use? What army? What regiments? Or did I perhaps block the passes of the Alps against you with my own body? Would that were

1 Valentinian was four years old when he was proclaimed Augustus.

2 See *PLRE* 1.159–60.

3 *Annona*, the military pay in kind. On this see Jones 1964, 458–60, 626–30.

4 Is. 1.17. Vulg. has *defendite* (defend) instead of *iustificare* (plead for) the widow, and is without *eripite iniuriam accipientem* (rescue the wronged), as is RSV.

5 *Iudices viduarum et patres orphanorum* which may be a recollection of Vulg. Ps. 67.6: *patres orphanorum et iudices viduarum*.

in my power! I would not then fear this reproach, I would not be afraid of your accusations now. By what promises did I trick you into consenting to peace?

Did I not meet the count Victor, whom you had sent to ask for peace in the Gallic provinces, not far from Moguntiacum [Mainz]? How then did Valentinian cheat you, whom you asked for peace, before he demanded it from you? How was Bauto¹ a cheat, who displayed loyalty to his emperor? Could it be because he did not betray his prince?

7. How have I misled you? Was it when I had just arrived, and you kept saying that Valentinian ought to come to you, as a son to his father, and I replied that it was unreasonable that a boy, and his widowed mother, should be required to travel in the Alps through the severities of winter? Or was the boy to be exposed to the perils of so great a journey without his mother? I was instructed to go on an embassy about peace, not to promise that he would come. It is obvious that I could not have given a guarantee on something which was outside my commission, certain at any rate that I refused to give such a guarantee, to the point that you said: "Let us await what replies Victor² brings back". However, as is well known, while I was detained, he reached Milan, and his demands were turned down. The two sides' desires were in agreement only as far as peace was concerned, not over the appearance in Gaul of the emperor, who ought by no means to travel. I was here when Victor returned. So, how could I have held back Valentinian? Envoys sent to the Gallic provinces for the second time to reject the request for Valentinian's coming, found me at Valence,³ in Gaul. I encountered soldiers of both sides, posted to guard the ridges of the mountains, when I was on my way home. Which of your armies have I recalled? What eagles⁴ have I diverted from Italy? What barbarians did the count Bauto let loose against you?

8. And would it have been surprising if Bauto, a man whose people live across the Rhine,⁵ had done this, when you threaten the Roman Empire with auxiliaries⁶ composed of barbarians and squadrons recruited across the frontier, whose provisions are paid for by the tribute payments of our

1 *PLRE* 1.159–60, s.v. Flavius Bauto. He was in effect the commander-in-chief of Valentinian's army.

2 *PLRE* 1.959, s.v. Victor 6.

3 *Valentia Gallorum*.

4 'Eagles' stands for legions, whose standards were surmounted by an eagle.

5 Bauto was of Frankish origin, *PLRE* 1.159–60.

6 *Auxilium* used in a narrow sense describes a particular kind of crack regular unit of the Roman army, see Jones 1964, 97–98; in a wider sense any auxiliary unit recruited for a particular purpose. Here units recruited by Maximus for his usurpation are probably meant.

provincials? But note the difference between your threats and the mildness of the boy Valentinian Augustus. You kept demanding that you might assault Italy accompanied by columns of barbarians, Valentinian turned back the Huns and Alans who were approaching Gaul through the territories of the Alamanni. What is there to resent if Bauto made barbarians fight it out with barbarians? Since while you were keeping the Roman soldiers occupied, and they were forming a defensive line on two fronts, right in the heart of the Roman Empire, the Iuthungi were plundering the Rhaetic provinces; and that is why the Huns were called in against the Iuthungi.¹ However, because they were laying waste Alamannia from the immediate neighbourhood, and already by the closeness of the devastation threatening the Gallic provinces, the Huns were compelled to abandon their triumphs, so that you should have nothing to fear. Compare the acts of the two: you caused the Rhaetias to be invaded, Valentinian purchased peace for you with his own gold.

9. Look also at the man, who is standing on your right.² When Valentinian was in a position to avenge his own bereavement, he honoured him and caused him to return to you. He was holding him in his territory, and at the instant of the report of his brother's murder, reined in his rage, and refrained from paying you back like for like, at the expense of one who, if not of imperial rank, was your brother. Just compare the conduct of the two of you! You be the judge! He returned to you your brother alive. You have to be asked to return his brother – dead!³ Why do you deny the remains of his brother to one who did not deny you support, even against his own interest?⁴

10. You fear that the return of the remains⁵ might renew the grief of the soldiers. At least so you say. Are they going to defend him now that he has been destroyed, whom they deserted when he was alive? Why do you fear him dead, whom you killed, when you could have saved him?' 'It was my enemy', he said, 'whom I destroyed'. 'Not your enemy', I replied, 'but you his. He is now unable to make his defence. Consider your case! If somebody were to decide to seize the empire from you in these parts today, would you,

1 In 373/4, cf. *Ep.* 73.21.

2 The brother of Maximus, see *PLRE* 1.547, s.v. Marcellinus 12.

3 According to Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 19 it was the object of Ambrose's second embassy to negotiate the return of the body of Gratian. In the letter what would seem to have been a principal object of Ambrose's mission is brought in almost incidentally.

4 *Adversum se auxilia*: the plural most often (as above) means auxiliary troops, but we have not been told that troops were sent. We have been told of two acts of support by Valentinian for Maximus: 1. The returning of Maximus' brother. 2. The buying off the Huns.

5 *Exuviae*, the clothing and equipment stripped from the body of a foe slain in combat.

I ask, would you call yourself his enemy, or him yours? Unless I am deceived, the usurper wages aggressive war, the emperor defends his rights. You ought therefore not have killed the man. Do you nevertheless refuse to hand over his relics? Let the emperor Valentinian have at least the remains of his brother as a pledge of your peaceful intentions. And how could you maintain that you did not order him to be killed, whom you now forbid to be buried? Will it be credible that you did not grudge him his life, whom you even grudge burial?

11. But to return to myself. I hear that you are complaining that the men around the emperor Valentinian choose to turn [for help]¹ to the emperor Theodosius.² But what did you expect would happen, seeing that when these men were fugitives, you pursued them for punishment, and killed those whom you captured. But Theodosius enriched them with gifts, enriched them with state offices.³ He said: 'Whom did I kill?' I answered him: 'Vallio,⁴ and what a man, what a warrior! Was it really a just reason for his destruction that he remained loyal to his emperor?' 'It was not I', he said, 'who ordered him to be killed'. I replied: 'We heard that his killing was ordered'. 'But if he had not laid violent hands on himself, I had ordered him to taken to Châlons-sur-Saône⁵ and burnt alive there.' I replied: 'Yes, and that is why this too⁶ was believed: that you killed him. For who would could expect to be spared, when so vigorous a warrior, so loyal a soldier, so useful a count had been killed?' I withdrew on the understanding that he would negotiate.

12. Later, when he saw that I was not in fellowship⁷ with bishops⁸ who were in fellowship with him, and who furthermore were petitioning that

1 *Se ad Theodosium imperatorem contulerint.*

2 That means they sought the support of Theodosius for Valentinian rather than that of Maximus, cf. McLynn 1994, 163. Themistius, *Or.* 18.220d shows that Theodosius did in fact plan an expedition to the West in 383/84, though he did not proceed with it.

3 *Honoribus.*

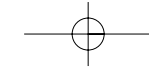
4 *PLRE* 1.945, perhaps *magister equitum* of Gratian.

5 *Cabillonum.*

6 This translation makes sense, but it translates 'illud' not the 'illum' found in the text. The text as it is might be translated 'it was believed that you killed his man because you killed that one'. But the context leaves it unclear who 'this man' and 'that man' are. Could the pair be Gratian and Vallio, or perhaps Merobaudes and Vallio (cf. Pacatus, *Panegyric to the Emperor Theodosius* (= *Panegyrici Latini* 12) 28.4)? The sentence remains puzzling.

7 Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 19 seems to have deduced from this, mistakenly, that Ambrose excommunicated Maximus.

8 The Spanish bishops who had accused Priscillian and his followers at Trier before Maximus and his praetorian prefect Euodius. Earlier they had appealed to Ambrose, but Ambrose had refused to support them (Sulp. Sev. *Chron.* 2.47–49).



APPENDIX I

357

certain persons, albeit straying from the faith, should be put to death,¹ he, instigated by them, ordered me to depart without delay. Although several persons thought that I would not be able to avoid being waylaid, I set out, feeling only one regret that I had learnt that the aged bishop Hyginus² was being led into exile, though he had only the last breath of life left in him. When I approached³ his companions that they should not allow an old man to be driven out without covering, without a pillow, I was myself driven out.

13. Here you have the account of my embassy. Farewell Emperor, and be on your guard against a man concealing war under a wrapping of peace. Farewell!

1 On the trial and execution or exiling of the Priscillianists see Chadwick 1976; A. R. Birley, 'Magnus Maximus and the persecution of heresy', *BJRL* 66 (1982–83), 13–43; K. M. Girardet, 'Trier, der Prozess gegen die Priskillianer', *Chiron* 4 (1974), 577–608.

2 Bishop of Cordoba and follower of Priscillian.

3 *Convenirem*, cf. use of the word in LXXVII.11

APPENDIX II

AMBROSE'S FUNERAL ORATION ON THE DEATH OF VALENTINIAN II (*DE OBITU VALENTINIANI*)¹

INTRODUCTION

The *De obitu Valentiniani* is basically the speech which Ambrose gave at the funeral of Valentinian II in summer 392. It may have been edited for publication, as ancient orations often were, but it is difficult to distinguish subsequent alterations from the original speech. Valentinian II had died in obscure circumstances in Gaul after a violent quarrel with the *magister militum* Arbogast. The date of his death was probably 15 May 392. Theodosius I, by age and experience² the senior emperor, was at Constantinople, and for quite a long time his attitude to the events in Gaul remained unclear. In due course Arbogast sent the body of the dead emperor to Milan, and Theodosius wrote to Ambrose ordering him to bury his dead colleague.³

The exact date of the funeral is uncertain. But we know that on 22 August 392 Arbogast proclaimed a civil servant called Eugenius emperor for the West. There is no mention of this in Ambrose's speech. It would therefore seem that the address was delivered some time before the proclamation of Eugenius, and in a very uncertain political climate.⁴ This is reflected in the

¹ *De obitu Valentiniani*, CSEL 73.327–67; also *Sancti Ambrosii Liber de Consolatione Valentiniani, a text with a Translation and Commentary*, by T. A. Kelly, Washington, DC, 1940; the old Benedictine edition is found in *PL* 16.1417–44. English translation by R. J. Deferrari in *Fathers of the Church* 22, Washington, DC, 1953, 263–99. Interpretation: M. Biermann, *Die Leichenreden des Ambrosius von Mailand. Rhetoric, Predigt, Politik*, Hermes Einzelschrift 70, Stuttgart 1955. Y.-M. Duval, 'Oraisons funèbres de saint Ambroise', in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en Occident*, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens 23, Geneva 1976, especially 260–74.

² Valentinian II had been proclaimed Augustus in August 375, and Theodosius in January 379, but Valentinian was four years old at his accession and only twenty-one at his death.

³ *Ep.* 25 (Maur. 53).

⁴ About two months after Valentinian's death (c. 49).

character of Ambrose's speech, which is quite uncharacteristically cautious. From the speech and other sources we learn that Valentinian's death was a direct result of the dispute with Arbogast. It was a dispute over policy: whether or not Valentinian was to lead the Gallic army into Italy to repel a threatening invasion from the Balkans. Arbogast had prohibited Valentinian from leading the army into Italy, and subsequently in a public and arrogant act of insubordination had torn up the rescript of Valentinian's which dismissed him from his command.¹ Valentinian's death followed soon after. Whether it was suicide or murder was uncertain. So was the attitude of Theodosius. It is possible that Theodosius had appointed Arbogast to his command with the instruction to keep the army in Gaul, and that in opposing Valentinian Arbogast was only obeying the orders of Theodosius.² Following the obscure and controversial death of the young emperor Ambrose must have been tempted to take sides, and to assign blame. It is striking that he did neither. He praises Valentinian for wanting to come to the aid of Italy, but carefully refrains from blaming Arbogast.³ He avoids giving a full account of the circumstances of Valentinian's death, and contents himself with some fairly obscure allusions, which nevertheless in the absence of more explicit evidence have had to serve as a principal source for the reconstruction of these events.⁴ One important point, however, emerges quite clearly: Ambrose did not think that Valentinian had been murdered. He quite strongly hints at suicide,⁵ and he, if anybody, was in a position to know. That Ambrose is not absolutely explicit should not cause surprise. Since he was praising Valentinian for having lived the last part of his short life as a model Christian, he had to tone down any suggestion that he had ended that life with the sin of suicide.

The address calls for comparison with the one Ambrose was to deliver three and a half years later after the death of Theodosius.⁶ That speech treats the death of the emperor in a definite political context, and is designed among

1 Zos. 4.53; Socrates, *HE* 5.25; Sozomen, *HE* 7.22.

2 There is an excellent discussion of Valentinian II's role in Gaul in McLynn 1994, 335–37.

3 C. 33: 'I am talking about the untimeliness of his death, not about its manner. For I am not using the language of accusation, but of grief.'

4 See below cc. 22–28, 80.

5 See cc. 33–35, and c. 50. But Kelly 1940, 35–41, after summarising the evidence of all sources, concludes that 'this jury of authorities, though not unanimous, is certainly largely in favour of the charge of murder against Arbogast'. See also B. Croke, 'Arbogast and the death of Valentinian II', *Historia* 25 (1976), 235–44.

6 *De obitu Theodosii*, see above pp. 176–202.

other things to help the transition to the government of Theodosius' young son Honorius and his powerful protector Stilicho. There is nothing of this kind in the address on the death of Valentinian. Theodosius, whose decisions must have been anxiously awaited in the West, is not even mentioned in the speech. The personalities other than Valentinian himself who figure in the speech are Valentinian's sisters, two of whom are said to be mourners at his tomb, Ambrose himself, and Gratian who receives his brother into heaven. As noted by McLynn, Ambrose has 'discreetly concluded the earthly affairs of the house of Valentinian'.¹ One might also say that he shows great respect for an imperial family, without committing himself to any solution to the current crisis.

With some simplification the speech can be said to fall into four parts: cc. 1–8 lamenting the death of Valentinian are followed by cc. 9–39 praising his Christian virtues. Cc. 40–57 address the mourners with arguments of consolation. Cc. 59–81 conclude the speech with a second lament, which ends with a prayer for the souls of Gratian and Valentinian.

According to its title in some MSS the speech is a consolatory oration. For Ambrose can indeed be shown to have adopted some of the rules and commonplaces of the consolatory genre, as they have been preserved for us in the rhetorical handbook of Menander (later second century AD),² and as they had been used more or less freely by many generations of secular orators, among them Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, and Seneca in his *Consolations*. A Christian genre for commemorating the dead,³ combining and adapting characteristics of the different classical sub-genres, was created by the two Cappadocian contemporaries of Ambrose, Gregory Nazianzen⁴ and Gregory of Nyssa.⁵ It was perhaps under their influence that Ambrose had

1 McLynn 1994, 341.

2 *Menander Rhetor*, edited with translation and commentary by D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, Oxford 1981, on Consolatory Speech (pp. 161–65). In rhetorical theory the consolatory speech, the monody, or formal lament (Russell and Wilson 1981, 201–07), and the 'speech over the tomb' or *epitaphios* (Russell and Wilson 1981, 171–78) are three subdivisions of the genre epideictic speech or declamation. But the adherence to the rules is nothing like as close as suggested by Kelly 1940, 10–16.

3 A review of Christian consolation literature centred on Jerome, *Ep.* 60: J. H. D. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliandorus*, Oxford 1993, esp. 23ff.

4 *Consolationes* on his brother Caesarius, his sister Gorgonia and his father, see various chapters in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 2000.

5 The most famous are the laudatory commemorations of his brother Basil and his sister Macrina, see J. A. Stein, *Encomium of Saint Gregory of Nyssa on his Brother Saint Basil*, Revised

composed the orations on the death of his brother Satyrus,¹ which together with the funeral orations for Valentinian II and Theodosius I are the earliest examples of the genre in Christian Latin literature.

The speech is not simply a *consolatio*. It also has features of a monody or lament,² and of a funeral speech.³ Moreover the classical conventions are handled with great freedom. After all this is above all a Christian sermon, and so, for example, the virtues of the deceased which are selected for praise are quite different from those praised in any classical funeral speech. Valentinian's virtues are specifically Christian with great stress on the belief that sincere repentance of sins opens the way to salvation. Ambrose proclaims himself confident that by practising these virtues both Valentinian and his brother Gratian have indeed achieved salvation. Besides consoling his hearers, Ambrose also presents Valentinian as a model for his congregation to imitate.

The literary character of the speech displays a mixture of classical and the Christian features. Vocabulary and syntax are classical. The oration has obviously been composed by somebody who had fully absorbed the traditional literary education, and is a master of rhetoric. The speech has two unmistakeable allusions to Virgil.⁴ The impact of the address is nevertheless quite unclassical. This is due to Ambrose's practice of consistently expressing his comments on the life and death of Valentinian in biblical phraseology. Lengthy passages are composed around biblical texts, sometimes quoted in full, sometimes only alluded to by the citation of a few words, and often merged into Ambrose's own sentences. Parts of the speech are like a patchwork quilt of biblical phrases. So he opens the address with a sustained lament, in which words used by the prophet Jeremiah to lament the fall of Jerusalem are applied to the death of the young emperor. Between passages from Lamentations Ambrose inserts descriptive passages from the Song of Songs, which he interprets as figuring the Church mourning the dead Valentinian. Towards the end of the speech⁵ Ambrose's use of the sensual and

Text, Commentary and Translation, Washington, DC, 1928; *Life of Macrina*, trans. W. K. Lowther Clarke, Early Church Classics, London 1916.

1 CSEL 73.209–305. English trans. in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 22, 161–259.

2 *Menander Rhetor* XVI (pp. 201–07).

3 *Menander Rhetor* XI (pp. 171–78); J. Soffel, *Die Regeln Menanders für die Leichenrede*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 51, Meissenheim am Glan 1974.

4 On syntax and vocabulary see the full treatment in the introduction and notes of Kelly 1940.

5 Cc. 59–69.

florid imagery of the Song of Songs' description of the bride in an elaborate eulogy of the soul of Valentinian produces an effect quite unlike anything to be found in any classical oration: *Your navel is a rounded bowl, that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.*¹ Ambrose goes on to interpret this as meaning: 'The good navel of his soul, is able to contain all the virtues, like a bowl turned by the Author of our faith himself... his belly too was not only filled with the food of justice as if with wheaten food, but also with the food of grace, and it flowered delightfully, like a lily'.

The allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, according to which the bridegroom signified Jesus, the Word of God, and the bride either the Church or the soul of a Christian believer, originated with Origen.² Ambrose was greatly impressed by Origen, and particularly by his allegorical commentary on the Song of Songs,³ which Ambrose employed extensively in his *Isaac or The Soul*.⁴ He evidently felt that, correctly understood, the Song of Songs gave a uniquely eloquent evocation of the relationship between Jesus and the perfect Christian soul.

Since Ambrose was setting up Valentinian as a model Christian soul, this use of the Song of Songs as interpreted by Origen was appropriate. It is likely moreover that the readings for the funeral service had been taken from Lamentations and the Song of Songs, and that Ambrose is among other things performing the normal role of a preacher of explaining the lessons.⁵

There is nevertheless something startling about some of these passages. Not only is the description of a woman applied to the soul of a man, and indeed an emperor, but the physicality of the imagery must have seemed incongruous to a person of traditional literary taste. Ambrose must have been well aware of that, and the effect is surely deliberate. Presumably he had chosen the readings himself. Did he perhaps deliberately set out to shock? Or, and this is much more likely, was he experimenting with a new

1 S. of S. 7.2.

2 Origen, *the Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson, London 1957, esp. 21–57, the prologue to the *Commentary*, in which Origen explains and justifies his allegorical interpretation.

3 The remains are in Origenes, *Commentarium in Cantica Canticorum*, in *Origenes Werke*, ed. Baehrens, GCS 33, Berlin 1932, 26–241.

4 CSEL 32.1.641–700; English translation by M. P. McHugh in *Fathers of the Church* 65, 9–65; also *De Mysteriis* (= *On the Mysteries*, trans. Ramsey 1997, 46–60), 7.37–41, 9.55–58; *De Virginitas* (= *On Virgins*, trans. Ramsey 1997, 73–91), 1.3.11; 7.39–8.47.

5 On the bishop's duty to explain Christian truth, see Humphries 1999, 161–63.

deliberately non-classical Christian style?¹ It is clear that Ambrose, like Augustine, was sensitive to the particular power of the imagery and language of the Bible.² Perhaps he was trying to communicate his appreciation to his audience.

The speech ends much more classically with a passage composed from David's lament for Saul and Jonathan: *How are the mighty fallen!* Ambrose applies this to Valentinian and Gratian, to compose a peroration which combines the biblical and the classical harmoniously, and in a way more characteristic of Ambrose's normal style.³

The reader will soon notice that very few of the biblical texts cited by Ambrose correspond exactly to the versions known from English Bibles, whether the Authorised Version or the Revised Standard Version. Many differ very considerably. Ambrose's citations often do not correspond to the version in Jerome's Vulgate either. Many of the quotations from the Old Testament, and notably those from the Song of Songs, are close to the Septuagint. In two passages Ambrose shows himself aware that the Greek text differed from the Latin one. But Faller, the editor, warns us that we must not assume that Ambrose regularly consulted the Greek version.⁴ It is likely that the Italian Latin version was already close to the Septuagint, and Ambrose did of course see crucial citations in their Greek version in Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. In Faller's edition biblical references to a text which differ from its version in the Vulgate are asterisked, while closeness to the Septuagint is indicated by (*Sept.*). The present translation has footnotes on the text of some of Ambrose's biblical citations, especially citations which differ significantly from the version known from the English Bible. But anyone looking for a more systematic account will have to turn to Faller or to Kelly 1940.

1 On Ambrose's response to *The Song of Songs* see E. Dassmann, *Die Frömmigkeit des Kirchenvaters Ambrosius von Mailand*. Münster 1965, 135ff; on his use of poetic techniques in prose (and vice versa) see J. Fontaine, 'Prose et poésie dans la création littéraire d'Ambroise', in Lazzati, vol. 1, 1976, 124–170.

2 The classical account of the difficulties educated pagans had with the language of the Bible and the Christian (above all Augustine's) response to this is ch. 1 (*Sermo humilis*) in E. Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. R. Mannheim, London 1965, 27–66.

3 See below cc. 79–80.

4 CSEL 73.4*.

TRANSLATION OF *DE OBITU VALENTINIANI*

1. Although it may increase one's grief to write¹ about that which causes one to grieve, nevertheless the act of recalling one whose loss we grieve often gives us comfort, for the reason that during the act of writing, while we focus our thoughts on the deceased, and make him the object of our attention, our words seem to bring him back to life. That is why it has been my heartfelt wish to record something of the last moments of the Younger Valentinian. Furthermore, I do not want to give the impression that by keeping silent I have expunged and left without honour the memory of a man who was dear to me, and to whom I owe gratitude, or that it should be thought that I have recoiled from an occasion that called for grief; when to give expression to grief is often a comfort to one who is grief-stricken. At the same time, when I am speaking about Valentinian, or even addressing words to him, I intend to speak as if he were present, or as if I was addressing him personally.

2. Where shall I start my dirge? With what grief am I to begin my bitter lament? *For us the days of our aspirations are turned to tears*,² since Valentinian has come to us, but not in the way we hoped. He did indeed insist on keeping his promise, even at the expense of his life.³ But for us his presence here, which was so longed for, has become most bitter. Would that he was not yet here for us, so that he might be alive for himself! But when he heard that the Alps of Italy were plagued by barbarian enemies,⁴ he could not bear it, and chose to risk his own life by leaving the Gallic provinces, rather than forsake us in our peril. Of course we recognise that it was a grave crime on the part of the emperor to wish to come to the rescue of the Roman Empire!⁵ This was the cause of his death, and it was altogether glorious. Let us pay our good emperor his wages in tears, for he paid us ours even with his life.

1 The use of the word 'write' shows that the introduction as we have it belongs to the published and not the original spoken version of the speech. The original introduction must have been addressed to the congregation attending the funeral. See Kelly 1940, 12.

2 Tob. 2.6.

3 Literally 'by his death'. The sentence implies that Valentinian's death was caused by his insistence on coming to Italy, cf. p. 359 above.

4 We have no other information about what at the time must have seemed a serious threat to Italy from the Balkans, which in the event seems to have been contained without much difficulty.

5 The irony of the sentence implies that some people were blaming Valentinian for wanting to come to Italy, and so being himself responsible for his death. See Introduction to speech.

3. And yet there is no need to encourage weeping. All are weeping already. Even people who do not know him are weeping, people who feared him are weeping also, some are weeping even against their will, the barbarians are weeping too, and even people who were thought to be his enemies. What lamentation rose among the population along the entire course of his route from the Gallic provinces to here!¹ For all mourn him not as if their emperor, but as if their common father had passed away, shedding tears as for a domestic grief; everyone mourning a personal loss. For two things make bitter the grief over the emperor whom we have lost: the immaturity of his years and the maturity of his judgement. For these things therefore I am weeping, as the prophet said: *My eyes are clouded with weeping, because he who used to comfort me has departed far from me.*² The eyes not only of my body, but even of my mind have been dimmed, and a kind of blindness has shrouded all my senses. For he has been torn from me who transformed my spirit and raised it from the depth of despair over our affairs to the highest hope.³

4. *Hear all you peoples and behold my sufferings, my maidens and young men have gone into captivity,*⁴ but when it became known that they were from the territory of Valentinian, they returned free. The barbarian enemy waged war on the young emperor, and forgetting his own victory, remembered the deference due to the emperor. Of his own accord he freed those whom he had captured, making the excuse that he did not know that they were Italians. We were still preparing a wall to add to the Alps, but the beneficent power⁵ of Valentinian did not stop at the ramparts of the Alps, at the torrential streams, at the ramparts of snow, but passing over Alps and rivers, it protected us with the wall of his authority.⁶ In view of this I think I ought to

1 Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 6.872ff.

2 This is based on Lam. 1.16 but differs considerably from both Vulgate and Septuagint which are parallel, though it agrees with Ambrose's citation in *De Paen.* 2.427. The prophet is Jeremiah, the supposed author of Lamentations.

3 The reference of this vague and ambiguous allusion to a dramatic change of mood on the part of Ambrose is obscure. The following chapter suggests that Ambrose is referring to events in spring 392, when, as he goes on to suggest, barbarians were on the point of invading Italy, but desisted and liberated their captives, without a battle, yielding to nothing more than the 'aura' of Valentinian. But the reference could be to Valentinian's return to orthodoxy, which is praised later in the speech.

4 Lam. 1.18.

5 *Gratia*, see glossary.

6 We have no fuller account of these obscure events. It would seem that the barbarian attackers, who had been the reason for Valentinian's intention of crossing the Alps, did win a victory, and were able to make prisoners of inhabitants on the border of Italy. But they did not follow

cite the opening of the prophet's lamentation: How Italy mourns, she who was abundant in joys!¹ *Weeping she has wept in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks. There is none to comfort her among all them that love her. All those who love her have despised her.² All her people are groaning...*³

5. And because it was Jerusalem of whom it was said that *she has mourned*, our Jerusalem, that is the Church, has also *mourned in the night*, because the man has died, who by his faith and devotion was making her more splendid. The words *weeping she has wept, and the tears are still on her cheeks* are therefore appropriate. For when the cheeks are bedewed⁴ with tears, the stain on the moistened face reveals the abundance of weeping. But as for the text *her⁵ cheeks⁶ are like vials of perfume yielding fragrance, her lips are lilies distilling full myrrh,⁷* this is understood allegorically as the grace of the weeping Church as she pours out the good perfume of her grief at the death of Valentinian, and celebrates his life by praising it. And death could not injure Valentinian because the fragrance of his praise, the object of universal celebration, has dispersed the stink of death.

6. So the Church weeps over her beloved son, and her tears are on *her cheeks*. Hear what is meant by *cheek*! *To him who has struck you on the cheek, offer him the other one also!*⁸ She (the Church)⁹ is to bear pain patiently in order that the one who has struck her should repent. You were

up their advantage and released the captives, even though Valentinian was still in Gaul. O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*, 6 vols., Berlin 1910–20, 5.240 suggests that the barbarians feared that if they continued their advance they would be caught between the armies of Valentinian and Theodosius. Ambrose, for the purpose of this speech at least, attributes the barbarians' behaviour to nothing but the awe inspired by Valentinian.

1 A very free adaptation of Lam. 1.1 RSV: 'How lonely sits the city that was full of people'.

2 This is Lam. 1.2 translating Sept.

3 Lam. 1.11 translating Sept. Ambrose has left the sentence unfinished.

4 *Rorantes*, cf. Lucretius 3.469.

5 *Eius*, whose gender, ambiguous in Latin, and masculine in its biblical context, is taken to be feminine in the translation in accordance with the allegorical interpretation of 'the beloved' as the church.

6 Ambrose at this point turns from interpreting Lamentations to the interpretation of the Song of Songs, where the word for 'cheek' is not *maxilla* but *gena*. At the start of c. 6 he goes back to Lamentations and *maxilla*, only to interpret another verse of the Song of Songs in line 11.

7 S. of S. 5.13.

8 Lk. 6.29.

9 Ambrose assumes, or at least argues on the assumption, that because the *maxillae* in Lam. 1.2 are to be understood as 'the cheeks' of the Church (in Ambrose's interpretation), so *maxillae* of Lk. 6.29 are to be referred to the Church also.

struck on the cheek, O Church, when you lost Gratian, and *offered the other one also* when Valentinian was snatched away from you. It is appropriate that your tears are not on one cheek only but on both; because you are piously mourning both brothers. You are mourning, O Church, and as you weep your cheeks¹ are as it were flooded with dripping streams of pious love. What then is meant by these cheeks of the Church, of which in another place the Scripture also says: *Your cheeks are like the skin of pomegranates*?² These are cheeks of a kind which habitually gleam with reverence and shine with beauty, and which display either the flower of youth, or the dignity of mature age.³ And so, whenever believing emperors die, our faith displays a certain amount of grief,⁴ our Church a certain degree of reverence, but when pious emperors die as prematurely as this all the beauty of the Church is turned into sadness.

7. The Church mourns in her wise men, who are, as it were, the head of the Church: *For the eyes of the wise man are in his head*.⁵ She mourns in her eyes, that is in her faithful members.⁶ For it is written *Your eyes are like doves transcending your silence*,⁷ because they see spiritually, and know how to keep silent even about the mysteries⁸ which they have seen. The Church mourns in her bishops, who are as it were the cheeks of the Church, who wear the beard of Aaron, that is the beard of the priesthood, on to which the ointment drips from the head.⁹ These are the men in whom the beauty of the Church resides,

1 *Genae*: Ambrose is about to return to the Song of Songs.

2 S. of S. 6.6.

3 This obscure sentence is explained in the following chapter: Ambrose interprets the cheeks of the Church to signify all the committed members of the Church: the baptised, the bishops and the virgins.

4 *Pudor*: not referring to a feeling of shame, but to the reddening of the cheeks as a result of weeping.

5 Ec. 2.14.

6 *Fidelibus*; *fideles* is sometimes, as here, used as a technical term for those baptised.

7 S. of S. 4.1. RSV has: 'Your eyes are doves behind your veil'. 'Transcending your silence' is a free rendering of *extra tacitatem tuam*, Ambrose's translation of the cryptic Septuagint text, which he cited from Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs; see *Procopiana excerpta ex Origine in Canticum Cantorum*, c. 4 (PG 13.202B).

8 The mysteries, i.e. baptism, the eucharist and confirmation, which *catechumeni* were not allowed to witness.

9 Allusion to Ps. 133.2 (Vulg. 132.2), which in RSV reads: 'Behold how good and pleasant it is if brothers dwell in unity! It is like precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron.'

in whom the flower of youth is more pleasing, in whom adulthood is more mature, who like the skins of the pomegranates are to display their beauty outwardly through physical abstinence, and inside the Church to feed the people of every age and sex entrusted to them with spiritual wisdom. While they are exposed to injury from the outside world, they dispense the mysteries to those within. The Church mourns in her virgins, who are like lilies, indeed like lilies full of myrrh, in the whiteness of their purity, as they display the glory of having subdued the temptations of the body.

8. The Church is therefore weeping in (all of) these, as it is written: *The roads of Sion mourn, her priests groan, her maidens have been dragged away, and within herself she is angry.*¹ She is indeed angry within herself, but she says to Valentinian: *I will lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. I will give you a drink of wine spiced with costly spices,*² that is, made with much labour from spices with strong scent, *from the juice of my pomegranates*, so that he may drink *the wine that gladdens the heart of man*,³ and that there may flow into him the juice of my pomegranates, in which there is much and various fruitfulness. For the juice of the pomegranates is an expression with many meanings, and enriched by diverse texts of scripture: the discourse of angels, the discourse of apostles and of prophets, all of whom the holy Church encloses as within a single skin.

9. When Valentinian sees these things displaying the fullness of unsullied grace, he replies:⁴ *The mercies of the Lord (be thanked) that we have not failed. For his compassion is not exhausted. He has renewed them like the morning light.*⁵ *My groans are many and my heart has failed me. The Lord is my lot I said, therefore I will wait for him him. The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good to hope for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man when he has born the heavy yoke in his youth. He will sit alone in silence, as he has had a heavy yoke laid on*

1 Lam. 1.4.

2 S. of S. 8.2 (Sept.).

3 Ps. 104.15 (Vulg. 103.15).

4 Ambrose lets Valentinian acknowledge the Church's mourning by giving thanks for the mercy of God that has enabled him to overcome his early sin (Arianism) and thus deserve the church's grief. He does this by putting into Gratian's mouth part of the day's reading from Lamentations, with the condition of the speaker of Lam. 3 applied to Gratian himself. This citation opens the section of the speech praising Valentinian's virtues.

5 Lam. 3.22.

APPENDIX II

369

him.¹ And Valentinian is indeed finding consolation in the reward of his virtues. Because in his youth he overcame troubles, and put up with many dangers, he chose to submit his vigorous mind, as it were his neck, to the heavy yoke of a determination to reform, rather than that soft one, of a life of pleasure.²

10. Blessed indeed is he who has corrected his error, even if only in old age; blessed is he who turns his mind from sin, even if only when death is knocking; for *blessed are those whose sins are covered*.³ For it is written: *Cease from evil and do good, and abide for ever and ever*.⁴ So everyone who will turn away from his sins and change to a better life, no matter at what age, will obtain forgiveness of his former sins, whether⁵ he has confessed them with a mind set on repentance, or rejected them with a disposition determined to do better.⁶ But Valentinian is one of a very large fellowship who have earned forgiveness.⁷ For there are many who have been able to turn their backs on their sins, and the temptations of youth, in old age. However, someone who has borne the heavy yoke of stern self-discipline⁸ in his youth is out of the ordinary. The yoke is that yoke of which the Lord says in the Gospel: *Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will revive you. Take upon you my yoke*!⁹ And so if anybody has borne this yoke in his youth, and before he could be laden with a heavy burden of sin, *he will*

1 Lam. 3.24–28. The standard Christian interpretation of these lines describing a man's suffering, which Valentinian is here made to apply to himself, was that they foretold the passion of Jesus.

2 The implication of the paragraph is that divine mercy has forgiven Valentinian's early adherence to the *Homoian*, or as Ambrose would say the Arian, sect and that he has been saved. The last sentence suggests that the troubles of Valentinian's reign had been a punishment for his Arianism, and that Valentinian had responded by living an ascetic life, and not a life of pleasure as a young prince might be tempted to do.

3 Ps. 32.1 (Vulg. 31.1).

4 Ps. 37.27 (Vulg. 36.27).

5 Ambrose argues that there are two ways in which a sinner can have his sins forgiven, either if he sincerely and formally confesses his sin, but also if he privately determines that he will sin no more. The latter, according to Ambrose, is what Valentinian had done.

6 A sincere determination to sin no more is as effective as formal confession and penance.

7 The oration remains a sermon, with a message to the whole congregation. Forgiveness for sins sincerely repented is open to all.

8 *Sobrietas*. Ambrose goes on to argue that Valentinian is special in that he already lived an austere life as a youth (in fact as an adolescent?), and not only took it up as part of his penance after he had sinned.

9 Mt. 11.28–29.

sit on his own, he is not to be compared with the many, but with him who can say: *For you have set me up in hope on my own.*¹

11. But perhaps you will say: how can Jeremiah call the yoke heavy,² when the Lord in the Gospel said: *My yoke is sweet and my burden light.*³ First of all note that the Greek only has 'yoke' and does not add 'heavy'.⁴ Notice also, that although the yoke is heavy in Lamentations, in the Gospel He says 'sweet yoke' and 'light burden', but He does not say 'light yoke'. For the yoke of the Word can be sweet even though it is heavy. It is heavy to a youth, heavy to a young man who is in fuller flower, and therefore unwilling to submit the neck of his mind to the yoke of the Word. The yoke of the Word can seem to be heavy, because of the burdens of discipline, because of the austerity of correction,⁵ because of the weight of self-restraint, of the curbing of lust; but it is sweet by the fruitfulness⁶ of grace, the hope of eternal life, the sweetness of a purer conscience. The Lord, however, called the yoke of the Word sweet, and the burden of obedience light, because for somebody who submits his neck to the yoke of the Word with patient neck, the burden of discipline cannot be heavy.

12. So *He that bears the yoke in his youth, will sit alone in silence*, rejoicing that the eternal mysteries of divine rewards has been revealed to him.⁷ On one interpretation he will keep silent, because he does not need a pardon for his sin, since he has forestalled sin by a timely confession, and has removed it by speedy correction. For to this man it will not be said *How will you find in old age the things you have not gathered in your youth?*⁸ The line can, however, also be understood in the sense that he who has promptly borne the yoke of the Word, that is from youth, will not mingle with other youths, but *will sit by himself in silence*, until he has instructed himself in the full perfection of virtue, and trained his mind in profound patience, and *will offer his cheek to one striking him*, and even submit to the outrage of murder, in order to be obedient to the heavenly commandments

13. For it is a great thing, whether you abstain from the vices of youth altogether, or abandon them at the entrance of youth in order to turn to more

1 Ps. 4.8 (Vulg. 4.10).

2 Lam. 3.27.

3 Mt. 11.30.

4 Ambrose has looked at the Septuagint as well as the Latin text.

5 'Correction' echoes 'has corrected' in the first sentence of c. 10.

6 Cf. 'the various fruitfulness' of the juice of the pomegranate in c. 8.

7 Lam. 3.27–28 also cited in c. 9.

8 1 Sir. 25.5.

serious things. For the ways of youth are unstable and confused. Therefore Solomon says: *Three things are impossible for me to understand, and a fourth too of which I have no experience: the trace of an eagle in the sky, the ways of a serpent on a rock, the paths of a ship sailing, and the ways of a man in his youth.*¹ David, however, said: *Do not remember the sins of my youth and ignorance!*² For a young man falls into sin because of the weakness of his unstable age, but he also frequently offends from ignorance of the commandments of heaven. However, the youth who offers the excuse of ignorance promptly earns forgiveness. That is why the prophet says: *Do not remember the sins of my youth and ignorance!*³ He does not say: Do not remember the sins of my old age and knowledge! And therefore, he⁴ who has promptly corrected and put right the vices of youth, like the prophet, offers youth and ignorance as an excuse.

14. Valentinian, being in a similar state to the prophet even in sin, also says: *Do not remember the sins of my youth and ignorance!*⁵ He not only said this but he also corrected his error before he learnt that his lapse was the result of any error.⁶ And so he says: 'Remember the correction of my youth'. Error is found in very many, correction in few.

15. And what am I to say about other activities of this man who thought that he must abstain even from the sport of youth, that the frivolity of his time of life must be restrained, that the harshness of public severity must be alleviated,⁷ that leniency which is normally associated with old age, and not an attribute of his own years, must be shown towards a man summoned for trial on a criminal charge? First of all, it used to be said that he enjoyed the games of the circus.⁸ He refuted this assertion so thoroughly as to be unwilling to

1 Pr. 30.18–19.

2 Ps. 25.7 (Vulg. 24.7).

3 Ps. 25.7 (Vulg. 24.7).

4 'He' here means anybody who has abandoned his sinful ways while still young.

5 Ps. 25.7 (Vulg. 24.7).

6 Ambrose here suggests that Valentinian did not know any better. In *Ep.* 25.2 (Maur. 53), Ambrose attributes Valentinian's adherence to Nicene Christianity to the influence of Theodosius, presumably after he had sought refuge with him from Maximus in 387.

7 It was recognised that there was a conflict between the commands of Christianity and the practice of Roman criminal justice, especially with regard to the use of torture and capital punishment. Ambrose, as governor, is said to have ordered torture to try to disqualify himself for the office of bishop: Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 7.

8 Traditionally these would have consisted of gladiator shows and wild beast hunts. Gladiators were now on their way out and chariot racing had probably become the predominant circus entertainment.

have circus games performed even on imperial birthdays, even for the sake of honouring the emperor.¹ Some people used to say that he was preoccupied with hunting wild beasts, and that his attention was being distracted from public duties.² He ordered that all the wild animals should be slain all at once.³

16. You might see Valentinian listening to discussions in the imperial consistory,⁴ and like another Daniel, young as he was, come to an appropriate and mature decision while old men were hesitating, or led astray with their eye on some dignitary. People who envied him used to put it about that he went off to lunch too early. He began to engage in fasting to the point that often, when he gave an elaborate banquet to his counts,⁵ he went without food himself, seeking at the same time to comply with the requirements of his sacred religion and the courtesy expected of an emperor.

17. It was reported that young nobles at Rome were dying with infatuation on account of the figure and beauty of a certain actress. He ordered her to come to court. The envoy was corrupted by a bribe, and returned without carrying out his instruction. Valentinian sent a second envoy so as not to give the impression that he had wanted to amend the vices of the young men, but had failed to do so. Some people were given an opportunity to sneer. Yet when she was brought before him, he never looked at her, or even saw her. Subsequently he ordered her to leave, so that all might note that his instructions had not been ineffectual; and in order to teach the youths to desist from their love for a woman, whom he, who was in a position to keep her in his power, disdained. And he did this when he did not yet have a wife, and was nevertheless giving proof of his chastity as if he was bound by wedlock.⁶ Who is as completely master of his slave as he was of his own body? Who is as strict a judge of others as he was censor⁷ of his own youthful behaviour?

1 See M. R. Salzman, *On Roman time*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / Oxford 1990, 133–35, a calendar of imperial *circenses* at Rome in 354. The *circenses* watched by Valentinian must have been at Milan or Trier.

2 Similar things were said about Gratian (Amm. Marc. 31.10.18–19).

3 The implication is that in preparation for the emperor's hunting wild animals were previously captured and caged, to be released only for the hunt.

4 Consistory: see glossary.

5 *Comitibus* (see glossary): *comes* means a companion, but in the Late Empire it also was a title awarded both to individuals, and *ex officio* to high officers of state. The latter is probably the sense here.

6 This anecdote recalls Livy 26.50: the self-restraint of Scipio Africanus.

7 The censor was a magistrate of the Roman republic, one of whose duties it was to watch over the way of life of members of the ruling class.

18. What am I to say about his piety? When some man of noble birth and wealthy family, circumstances which are liable to arouse envy, was charged by an informer with aiming at the throne and the prefect was pressing the case, Valentinian replied that nothing involving bloodshed should be decreed, especially not on holy days. And when a few days later the document of the informer was being read out, he declared it to be a calumny, and ordered the accused to be kept at liberty until the prefect heard the case.¹ And neither before nor after did anybody fear the infamy of so grave an accusation when the young emperor presided. The youth smiled at what strong emperors in their prime dread.²

19. Rome had sent envoys in order to recover the rights of temples, the secular privileges of priesthoods, the performance of its sacred rites, and what is more serious, they were making the effort in the name of the senate.³ And when all who were in attendance in the consistory, Christians and pagans alike, were saying that these things should be restored, he alone, like Daniel, the spirit of God being stirred within him, denounced the faithlessness of the Christians, and opposed the pagans saying: 'How can you think that I must restore what my pious brother has taken away?' For this act would wrong both his religion and his brother, by whom he refused to be surpassed in piety.⁴

20. And when the precedent of his father was brought up, in that during the reign of his father nobody had taken these objects away,⁵ he replied: you praise my father because he did not take them away, I have not taken them away either. Did then my father restore them, that you can demand that I must restore them? Moreover even if my father had restored them, it was my brother who has taken them away. In this business I would prefer to be the

1 Nothing else is known about this case.

2 Of recent emperors, Constantius, Valens and Valentinian I had been responsible for series of trials involving charges of treason and/or magic.

3 See the speech of Symmachus on behalf of the envoys and Ambrose's two replies to that speech, *Epp.* 72a, 72, 73 above pp. 61ff. Kelly 1940, 262–63, argues that Ambrose is referring to the deputation of 391, because he does not mention the part he himself played in the refutation of the request of the deputation of 384. But references to Symmachus, *Relatio* 3, make it clear that Ambrose is here referring to the events of 384. He has not mentioned his own part, because he is speaking in praise of Valentinian.

4 This answers Symmachus, *Relatio* 3 (*Ep.* 72a).20. Whether Valentinian actually used this argument or not, it is suspiciously similar to what Ambrose suggests ought to be the reply to chapter 20 of Symmachus' speech (*Ep.* 73.39), which was of course written after the decisive meeting of the consistory.

5 Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.19.

imitator of my brother. Or are you suggesting that my father was Augustus, but my brother was not?¹ The same respect is owed to each, as the service each has done for the state is the same. I will imitate both, so that I am not going to restore what my father also could not restore, because nobody had taken it away, and I will maintain what has been decreed by my brother. Let mother Rome² ask for whatever else she wants. I owe affection to a parent, but I owe obedience to the author of salvation even more.

21. What am I to say about the love of provincials, whether that with which he embraced them, or that with which the provincials repaid the man who was protecting their interests, who would never allow any indiction³ to be imposed on them? 'They are unable to pay earlier imposts', he said, 'will they be able to pay new ones?' The provinces⁴ honour Julian for this.⁵ But the latter was in the prime of life, the former only passing through young manhood. The former found much, and spent it all,⁶ the latter found nothing, and had abundance of everything.⁷

22. When he was residing in the transalpine regions he heard that barbarians were approaching the borders of Italy.⁸ Worried that his kingdom might be attacked by a foreign enemy, he hurried to come here, wishing to abandon his Gallic inactivity to take a share in our danger.

23. Knowledge of these facts others share with me. The following is known only to myself: he frequently addressed me when I was far from him,⁹

1 In fact, Gratian had been proclaimed Augustus on 24 August 367.

2 Cf. Symmachus, *Relatio* 3(*Ep.* 72a).9.

3 *Nihil unquam indici*: The sentence is ambiguously phrased, deliberately so, but the following sentence shows that Valentinian's refusal applied only to additional taxation, to a *superindictio*; see glossary.

4 The comparison with Julian makes clear that the reference is to the Gallic provinces and therefore to the years 388–92.

5 See Amm. Marc. 17.3.1–5.

6 Julian certainly did not 'find much' when he came to Gaul, which was at the time overrun by the Alamanni, but he did eventually spend a great deal on his Persian campaign, see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, London 1989, 89.

7 The aphorism compares Valentinian favourably with Julian, but in terms that are vague and ambiguous.

8 Spring 392.

9 That is, when Ambrose was at Milan and Valentinian in Gaul, 388–92. This sentence implies that Valentinian wrote to Ambrose privately. According to c. 25 no letters of Valentinian actually reached Ambrose to inform him of the crisis in Valentinian's relations with Arbogast, but Valentinian had evidently been in communication with Ambrose earlier. None of the letters has come down to us.

and let it be known that he wished to be initiated into the sacred mysteries,¹ preferably by me. Nay, when a certain rumour reached the city of Vienne that I was travelling there in order to invite him to Italy, how glad he was! How he showed his joy, that I would be with him as he wished! The delay of my arrival seemed to him excessively long. And would that the announcement of his own (imminent) arrival (in Italy) had not forestalled it!²

24. I had already promised that I would set out. Men of rank and even the praetorian prefect³ had asked me (to travel) in order that the peace of Italy might be safeguarded. I replied that while my modesty would not allow me to intervene when there was no need, I would not fail them in the emergency. The matter had been settled, when lo and behold, the next day a letter requiring the getting ready of hostels,⁴ the arrival of the insignia of the imperial office, and other things of that kind, indicated that the emperor was about to set out. In these circumstances the mission was put off by the very men who had demanded it.⁵

25. It seemed to me that I owed you an explanation for the fact that my appearance was expected but not realised. But would that you to whom I owe this justification were still alive! My excuse would have been that I had heard of none of your dangers,⁶ that I had received no letters from you, that even if I had started on my journey I could not have come to meet you using my own horses.⁷ And so I was sure that you would forgive me, while I was counting the days and speculating by which route you would come.⁸ But lo and behold, I receive an imperial rescript that I am to make up my mind to travel without delay! Because you wanted to have me as a guarantor of your

1 Ambrose's *De mysteriis* includes confirmation and eucharist as well as baptism. All three were part of the initiation ceremony at Easter.

2 Ambrose put off his journey when it was announced that the arrival of Valentinian was imminent

3 Nicomachus Flavianus, praetorian prefect of Italy since 390, who continued to serve under Eugenius, and committed suicide when Eugenius was defeated.

4 *Mansiones*, the way stations set out at regular intervals along the roads providing relays of draught animals and accommodation for the users of the public transport service, the *cursus publicus*.

5 The prefect and the *honorati*.

6 Evidently arising from his disagreements with the *magister militum* Arbogast.

7 Ambrose must mean that he could not have travelled to Gaul without public transport (i.e. without using the facilities of the *cursus publicus*) so that it would have been impossible for him to travel once the prefect no longer favoured the mission.

8 *Iter lego*: cf. Virg. *Aen.* 9.392ff.

good faith towards your count.¹ Did I resist? Did I delay? There was a post-script that I should hasten to come there quickly, and that I was not to think that the reason for my journey was the council of Gallic bishops, whose constant disputes² I had several times used as an excuse, but that he himself was to receive baptism.³

26. At the time when I was about to set out, I was in a position to recognise indications of what had already been happening, but in my eagerness to hurry I was unable to take notice of anything. I was already crossing the ridges of the Alps when, lo and behold, there came news, bitter for myself and everybody, of the death of so great an emperor. I turned back, bathed in tears. With what prayers from all had I set out! With what lamentations from all did I return! For people thought that they had been robbed not of their emperor, but of their safety.⁴ With what anguish was I tormented, because one had died, who first and foremost was so great an emperor, who was so dear to me, and who was so very fond of me. What emotions did he experience – as I was informed – during the two days that he survived the letter he had sent to me!⁵ The *silentarius*⁶ had left in the evening. In the morning of the third day he asked whether the man had returned, whether I was coming. So convinced was he that some kind of security⁷ for him was on its way.

27. O most noble youth, would that I had been able to find you alive, would that some delay had preserved you until my arrival!⁸ I make no claims for any power that might have been mine, none for my skill and foresight.

1 *Vadem fidei tuae habere me apud comitem tuum velles*: the count is no doubt Arbogast. But what precisely is the meaning of the sentence? Palanque 1933, 268, thought that Ambrose was simply required to act as a mediator between Valentinian and Arbogast, something which the fact that Arbogast was an admirer of Ambrose (Paulinus, *V. Ambr.* 30) would have helped him to do. But McLynn 1994, 336 n.153, insists that the wording of c. 27 must imply that Ambrose would have been required to stand surety for a specific matter. See p. 377 n. 1 below.

2 Disputes over Priscillian, see H. Chadwick 1976.

3 In *Ep.* 25.3 (Maur. 53) Ambrose explains to Theodosius Valentinian's 'irrational' (*non rationaliter*) wish to be baptised by himself rather than by a Gallic bishop.

4 There was now no emperor in the West to defend Italy.

5 Ambrose clearly obtained precise information about the last days of Valentinian, but he carefully refrains from revealing the story in his speech.

6 The *silentarii* were a corps of the palace staff who acted as ushers during meetings of the consistory and were sometimes, as in this case, used on confidential missions.

7 *Quandam salutem*: physical safety but also, through baptism, salvation.

8 Note that Ambrose deliberately refrains from stating or even hinting at the cause of death, whether it was murder or suicide.

But with what pains, with what diligence would I have restored harmony and favour between you and your count! How (wholeheartedly) would I have offered myself as a guarantor of your trustworthiness, and how (readily) would I have drawn onto myself the men who the count said make him afraid.¹ At any rate, if the (attitude of the) count had not been changed,² I would have remained with you. I was taking it for granted that that you would listen to me, if you saw that I had not been heard when speaking on your behalf.³

28. I once had much to hold on to: now I have nothing except tears and weeping. As I grieve, you seem to me to be becoming greater every day, you are growing for me as I mourn. Everybody is bearing witness how highly you regarded me. Everybody is declaring that my absence was the cause of your death. But I am not Elias. I am not a prophet that I could have known what would happen. But *I am a voice crying*⁴ and groaning, in order that I might express my sorrow at what has happened. For what is there that it would be better for me to do than to expend tears in return for your great affection for me? I took you up as a small boy, when I travelled as an envoy to your enemy.⁵ When you were entrusted to me by your mother's hands I

1 What precisely would Ambrose have made himself a pledge for? He has of course here, as in c. 25, left this ambiguous deliberately. See McLynn 1994, 336, who assumes, as is likely but not certain, that Arbogast had stopped Valentinian from marching into Italy because he knew that Theodosius had given orders that Valentinian and the Gallic army should stay in Gaul. He therefore suggests that Ambrose would have guaranteed that Arbogast would not be punished if he allowed the Gallic army to be moved into Italy. I think this unlikely. If Arbogast was afraid to be punished by Theodosius for failing to obey the emperor's order, no bishop, not even Ambrose, could have pledged his safety. My interpretation would be that Arbogast, as a result of the enormously provocative insubordination he had displayed towards Valentinian (Zos. 4.53), had made further coexistence between them impossible. For the moment Valentinian was helpless, but in time his own sense of honour, and the need to maintain the prestige of the imperial office, which would undoubtedly be urged upon him by his advisers, would force Valentinian to seek revenge. So by normal standards one of the two would have to die. This would be a situation in which a bishop, above all a bishop who was trusted by both men, as Ambrose evidently was, might just have been able to persuade them that they had nothing to fear from each other, and so restore sufficient trust to avoid a catastrophe.

2 Translating *inflexus* as passive participle of *inflectere*.

3 The sentence implies that Ambrose would have spoken to both parties and was trying to obtain some concessions from each.

4 Mt. 3.3; Mk 1.3; Lk. 3.4; Jn 1.23.

5 This was Ambrose's first embassy to the usurper Maximus in Gaul, which achieved its aim of persuading Maximus not to invade Italy. On the two embassies to Maximus see above pp. 134–35, 349, and below p. 378.

embraced you.¹ I travelled to Gaul as your envoy a second time, and this duty was congenial to me, firstly because it involved your safety, and secondly because it was undertaken on behalf of peace and the piety which made you demand your brother's ashes. Though you were still not free from anxiety about your own safety, you were concerned that your brother should be buried with due honour.²

29. But let me return to Lamentations and enter into the very heart of my grief!³ *What can I say for you, or what compare to you, O daughter of Jerusalem? Who will make you safe? Who will comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For great grief has come over you. Who will heal you?*⁴ And who will console me from whom others seek the task of consolation? *He has filled me with bitterness, he has made me drunk with gall, my bowels are in pain,*⁵ to use the eloquence of the prophet because I have lost him whose father in the Gospel⁶ I was about to become.

30. But he did not lose the grace which he had demanded,⁷ the man who for me rose again⁸ in the sermon which I spoke to the people⁹ today. For¹⁰ when in the course of my discussion of the appointed lesson I happened to mention

1 The words 'I took you up ... you were entrusted to me by your mother's hands ... I embraced you', need not be interpreted to imply a scene in the course of which Justina placed the boy in Ambrose's arms. Since Justina and Ambrose were on very bad terms that is extremely unlikely. Nevertheless it is evident that after Gratian's death the people who ran the Western empire in the name of the young Valentinian must have decided that Ambrose was the right man to conduct the vital negotiations with Maximus, and therefore 'entrusted' the twelve-year-old emperor to Ambrose in a metaphorical sense.

2 Cf. introduction and translation of *Ep.* 30, pp. 349ff.

3 After praising Valentinian's virtues Ambrose briefly returns to Lamentations and expressions of personal grief. This is in accordance with Menander's advice to the speaker of a consolatory speech not to keep rigidly to the order of themes, but by digressing to give the impression that he is out of his mind with emotion, *Menander Rhetor* IX (p.161).

4 Lam. 2.13, translating Sept.

5 Lam. 3.15 and Jer. 4.19 according to Sept.

6 1 Cor. 4.15. Ambrose was going to become the father of Valentinian in the Gospel by baptising him.

7 Although he did not receive baptism, he gained salvation as if he had been baptised, because of his piety and desire (*pietas et voluntas*) as explained in c. 53.

8 Ambrose is now referring to a sermon that he had given earlier on that day also on the subject of the funeral of Valentinian in which he had stated (as he will do in this sermon) his confidence that Valentinian had been saved and gone to heaven. 'For me' would mean something like 'in accordance with my firm belief'.

9 *Ad plebem*: this suggests that the present sermon is addressed to a select audience.

10 After an episode of lamentation, Ambrose resumes his praise of Valentinian's virtues, eventually praising Valentinian as one of the 'poor', or one of the 'poor in spirit'. But most of

that the poor people were blessing God,¹ I began to raise the question who this people was, and to distinguish two peoples, one people that was rich and another that was poor: the rich people being the Jews, and the poor people the Church. The former is rich in revelations entrusted to it, the latter poor, and borrows the revelations of others. It is right that it should be poor, for it has been assembled by a poor man, namely by Him *who though he was rich, became poor, so that by His poverty we might become rich.*² For he emptied Himself³ that he might fill all.

31. But how can He be poor who had the wealth of eternity and the *fullness of deity*?⁴ After all when He was in the flesh he said: *Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power.*⁵ And elsewhere He says to Peter: *To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.*⁶ Was He who was giving away the kingdom of heaven then really a poor man? Listen in what sense He was poor: *Take my yoke upon you for I am mild and humble at heart.*⁷ So his people too is poor in this sense, not because it is in actual want. In fact I consider it richer than that other people, for it earned the right to have not only the oracles of the prophets, but also the teachings of the apostles inspired by the Divine Spirit.

32. He, to whom it was said: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* was therefore not poor in the sense of destitute, but poor in spirit. Truly blessed are the poor who received something which the rich were without. One of them is that poor prophet of whom it was written: *That poor man cried and the Lord heard him.*⁸ One of this people is he who says: *Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise and walk.*⁹ That is why that poor founder of the poor

cc. 30–32 seems to be an excursus in which Ambrose explains the use of ‘poor’ and ‘rich’ in the earlier sermon – as if answering somebody’s criticism that he had used these words inconsistently.

1 If the appointed lesson at the service was 2 Cor. 8, this a reference to verses 11–12: ‘You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God’.

2 2 Cor. 8.9.

3 Phil. 2.7.

4 Col. 2.9.

5 Mt. 26.64

6 Mt. 16.19.

7 Mt. 11.29.

8 Ps. 34.7 (Vulg. 33.7).

9 Acts 3.6.

people¹ said: *O God be not silent in my praise! For the mouth of a wicked man, and the mouth of a deceitful man has been opened against me. They have spoken against me with lying tongues. They have beset me with words of hatred and attacked me without cause. Instead of loving me they disparaged me, but I was praying.*² Prayer is a good shield by means of which all the flaming javelins of the adversary are repelled. That is why the Lord Jesus was praying,³ and why Valentinian, His imitator was praying also.⁴

33. But perhaps it will be said: 'what good did his prayer do him? For behold, he died near the start of his life's course!' I am talking about the untimeliness⁵ of his death, not about its manner.⁶ For I am not using the language of accusation,⁷ but of grief. But even the Lord prayed, and he was crucified. For the object of his prayer was this: that he might take away the sins of the world.⁸ Let us hear therefore for what the disciple of Christ should pray – that is surely for what the Master has taught to pray. But He taught that we must *watch and pray that we do not enter into temptation*,⁹ that means lest we fall into sin. For this is the meaning of temptation for a Christian, the possibility that he might fall and endanger his soul. But the perfection of faith does not fear death.

34. But one ought to supplicate also for one's enemies, pray also for one's persecutors, as the Lord himself prayed, saying: *Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*¹⁰ Observe His great clemency! They were persecuting the author of their existence. He used to forgive grave sins even to his enemies. No, he even excused their offence by covering it with

1 The poor people are the Church.

2 Ps. 109.2–4 (Vulg. 108.2–4).

3 Ps. 109.2–4 (Vulg. 108.2–4): this is a psalm of David, but Ambrose assumes that Jesus was speaking through the mouth of David.

4 Valentinian is praised for imitating Christ, so also in n. 161 below.

5 Literally 'speed' (*celeritate*).

6 Ambrose consistently refrains from stating explicitly his view on how Valentinian died, whether by murder or suicide. C. 33: 'I am not using the language of accusation...' makes death from natural causes unlikely. The narrative of cc. 26–27 implies that Ambrose thought that if he had travelled to Gaul, Valentinian might still be alive. Moreover according to c. 35 Valentinian 'offered himself on behalf of all'. This suggests suicide.

7 He could not talk about the manner of the death without condemning either a murderer (presumably Arbogast) or a suicide (Valentinian himself).

8 The phrase is adapted from Jn 1.29. The phrase is not included in any of the Gospel reports of the prayers of Jesus before the crucifixion.

9 Based on Mt. 26.41, Mk 14.38; cf. Lk. 22.40.

10 Lk. 23.34.

the veil of their ignorance, saying *because they are ignorant of what they are doing*. For if they knew, they would not be persecuting their Lord, on whose power and jurisdiction they would think that their salvation depended. And because the persecutors of Christ were not satisfied with his death alone, they added curses and insults. As he himself said: *They will curse, but you will bless*.¹ He taught us that we ought not to fear in the least the curses of those persecuting us, since we possess the source of all blessing. Nor ought insults to disturb us, when there exists a patron who can remove curses.

35. What of the fact that Valentinian was not afraid to die? On the contrary, he offered himself on behalf of all,² saying that for no reason innocent persons were facing hostility, that others were endangered for no reason on his account. He preferred death for himself rather than be a cause of death for others.³ Such is the teaching of the Gospel of the Lord who said at the moment of his own arrest: *if you are seeking me, allow these others to go away*.⁴ So Valentinian died on behalf of all those he loved, a man on whose behalf his friends thought it mattered little if they were all to die.

36. We have seen how he was minded towards his friends. Let us examine the affection he displayed towards his sisters.⁵ With them he took his recreation, with them he found his solace. With them he relaxed his mind and relieved his emotions, and comforted (their) spirits when they were exhausted with worry. If they seemed to have been offended by their brother through some boyish thoughtlessness of his, or by some remark, he used to ask them to pardon him, and to pray for the Lord God's forgiveness on his behalf. He used to kiss the hands and heads of his sisters, forgetting that he was emperor, mindful that he was their brother. And the more he stood above others by the

1 Ps. 109.28 (Vulg. 108.28). Ambrose again assumes that Jesus spoke through the mouth of David.

2 This as near as Ambrose comes to stating that Valentinian committed suicide. So also in c. 32. But he is also presenting him as Christ-like, or rather as imitating Christ.

3 This is again very obscure, but must somehow be related to the tension between Valentinian and Arbogast. Perhaps what is hinted at is that Valentinian realised that unless the tension between him and his commander-in-chief was ended, innocent third parties would get involved and be killed, and that rather than let this happen he chose to remove himself from the scene by suicide.

4 Jn 18.8

5 These are the sisters Justa and Grata, both dedicated virgins (*sanctae necessitudines*), holy relatives (c. 37) holy souls (c.38), who were present at the funeral, and whom he addresses in this part of the speech as the principal mourners. He does not mention Galla, the third sister now married to the emperor Theodosius, and with him at Constantinople. It is surely also in some way significant that he does not mention Theodosius anywhere in the speech.

right of his power, the more humbly he behaved towards sisters.¹ He used to ask them not to remember wrong but to remember kindness.

37. It happened that he was hearing a certain case concerning one of their properties. For he was so great a man that the provincials thought that he would be a fair arbiter even in a case in which his sisters were involved. But though he was drawn by love to favour his holy relatives, he nevertheless tempered family loyalty² with justice. He heard the case, which was concerned not with the right of ownership, but with the occupation and usage of the estate.³ On one side family loyalty was struggling for the sisters, on the other compassion was struggling for the case of the orphan, with the result that Valentinian interceded with his sisters on the orphan's behalf.⁴ Valentinian delegated the case to a public judge so that he might wrong neither family feeling nor justice. But privately – as we have deduced from the decision reached by the noble maidens – he so impressed his holy sisters with his own feelings that they reached the decision to yield the estate, and made this known.⁵ O sisters, indeed worthy of such a brother, seeing that they chose to release their ownership of a property that their mother had left them, rather than that their brother should sustain denigration on their account!⁶

38. You have a more valuable inheritance in this, O holy souls, the praise and glory of your brother. With these your pious brother ennobled and enriched you more, he who did not load your heads with jewels, but with kisses, who did not adorn your hands with royal insignia but fondled them with his imperial mouth. His only consolation was in the enjoyment of your presence, consequently he did not even feel a very strong desire for a wife. This was why he put off his marriage: because the pious affection of your grace sustained him. Let these things be the cause of love and remembering rather than of grief to you, so that your brother's glory revives your spirit more than your grief tortures. Tears often both sustain and lift the spirit. Weeping refreshes the heart, and brings solace to a grieving affection.

39. You are indeed seeing a cruel funeral. But the blessed Mary stood by the cross of her son, and the virgin saw the passion of her Only-begotten. I read

1 Once again following the example of Christ.

2 *Pietas*, see glossary.

3 Not *de iure* but *de possessione*.

4 This is the only reference to that case.

5 Ambrose implies that they yielded not only *possessio*, but full *de iure* ownership as well.

6 The account of the case concerning the sister's estate leads on to the next section of the speech which is the consolation proper, and which is addressed to the sisters.

that she stood. I do not read that she wept.¹ Then her son said to her: '*Woman, behold your son*'. And to the disciple² *he said: 'Behold your mother,'*³ bequeathing to them the inheritance of his love and his grace. And therefore, my pious children,⁴ I long to show you the affection of a father, even though because of my sins I was found unworthy to save your brother. When I see you I see him, I hold him, and think that I am in his presence, indeed in the presence of both brothers,⁵ about whose loss I feel as if my eyes had been plucked out. It is more auspicious for bishops to be persecuted by emperors than to be loved by them. How much more fortunate for me did the threats of Maximus prove? His hatred resulted in praise. The love of these brothers left a heritage of bereavement and suffering. Would that I had been allowed to pour out my life for you, my sons! My grief would have been cut short, and it would have been glorious for me to die for children such as these.⁶

40. But, holy daughters, I must return to your consolation, even though the bitterness of what has happened consumes all the force of consolation. For if consolation is brief it provides nothing that will comfort bereaved affection; but if it is too long it prolongs the painful memory. For the more long-winded you are, the more you will upset the person you are seeking to comfort, and the longer you will draw out his sorrow.

41. I am not therefore going to wipe away your tears with my address as with a sponge. Nor would I want to do that even if I could. For pious affections have a kind of pleasure even in weeping, and heavy sorrow is often dispersed by tears. But I make this demand, that with your bitter laments you do not tear away from you the brother implanted in your breast, that you do not turn him out with your lamentations, and do not wake him from his rest. Let him remain in your hearts, let him live in your breasts, let him cling to your pious embraces as he used to do, let him press a brother's kisses on you; may he be ever present in your eyes, ever in your kisses, ever in your conversations, ever in your minds. His state is now such that you have no need to fear for him, as you used to previously. Forget his affliction, remember his state

1 Mt. 27.55–56; Mk 15.40–41; Lk. 24.49.

2 The disciple John.

3 Jn 19.26–27.

4 *Pia pignora*.

5 As if remembering that there was some incongruity in seeing one brother in two sisters, Ambrose corrects himself (no, I see both brothers Valentinian and Gratian), and continues for the rest of the paragraph to refer to brothers in the plural.

6 *Pignoribus*.

of grace! You are to hope that he will help you. Let him stand by you as a protector at night. Let not even sleep separate him from you.

42. But you are longing to hold his body; pressing against the tomb you cling to it. Let that tomb be your brother's dwelling for you, let it be the hall of his palace, in which the limbs so dear to you are to rest.

43. But if you call me back to that particular sorrow, that he departed from life so soon, I do not deny that he died at a premature age. We would wish we were in a position to sustain him with time taken from our life, so that he, who could not enjoy his own years, might live with years of ours.

44. But I ask whether there is any sensation after death or whether there is none. If there is, he lives; or rather because there is, he is now enjoying eternal life. For how can he not have sensation, whose soul both lives and is vigorous and will return to its body, and when it has been restored to it, will make it live again. The Apostle proclaims: *But we would not have you ignorant, brethren concerning those who are asleep; that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.*¹ Therefore life remains for those whom resurrection awaits.

45. But if the pagans who have no hope of resurrection find consolation in this one thought, that after death the dead have no sensation, and that consequently they have no sensation of pain,² how much fuller consolation ought we to experience, for whom death is not to be feared because it is the end of sinning, and who need not despair of a life, which is to be restored by resurrection. Job too teaches that death is not to be feared but rather to be longed for by the pious, saying: *O that thou wouldst guard me in hell, that thou wouldst conceal me until thy wrath is passed, and that thou wouldst appoint me a set time, when you will remember me! For if a man die he shall live again. Completing the days of my life I shall wait till I am made again. Then thou wilt call, and I will obey thee.*³ *But do not despise the work of thy hands.*⁴

¹ 1 Thess. 4.13.

² This is Epicurean doctrine (e.g. Lucretius 3.830ff.), but it was used much more widely as a consolatory argument as in Plato, *Apology* 40, cited by Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.41. The hope of an afterlife was certainly familiar to pagans, especially those influenced by Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophy, but it was less central to their religion than to Christianity. The works of F. Cumont, notably *After Life in Roman Paganism*, London 1923, are now in many ways outdated, but have not really been superseded.

³ Job 14.13–14.

⁴ Ps. 138.8 (Vulg. 137.8).

46. Granted that one must mourn the fact that he died at an early age, one must nevertheless rejoice that he died a veteran in the service of the virtues. So great was his moral improvement during adolescence, that time of life so full of hazards for everybody, so great the praise of his decency and rectitude, that it shrouds all recollection of our grief. That he died is a mark of his fragility, that he was such a man is cause for admiration. How happy the state would have been, if it had been able to keep him longer! But as the life of saints is not the life on earth, but that in heaven; for to the just *to live is Christ and to die is gain, because to suffer dissolution and to be with Christ is much better*.¹ We must grieve because he was snatched from us so soon, we must be consoled because he has passed to better things.

47. That is why David wept for his son as he was about to die, he did not mourn for him when he was dead. He wept in fear that his son would be snatched away from him, but he ceased to weep when he had been snatched away, and he knew him to be with Christ.² And so that you may understand that what I say is true: David wept for his incestuous³ son Ammon when he had been killed,⁴ he wept for the parricide⁵ Absalom when he had been slain,⁶ saying: *O my son Absalom, my son Absalom!* He did not think that he needed to lament his innocent son. He believed that the two former had perished, and that he had lost them, because of their crime, while the latter because of his innocence would live.

48. Therefore you have no reason to indulge in deep mourning as far as your brother is concerned. He was born a man, subject to human fragility. Nobody is able to buy exemption from death, not a rich man, not even kings. No, they are liable to harsher ends. Job said: *The years of the powerful man are numbered, his fear is in his ears;*⁷ *just when he seems to have peace, his destruction will come*.⁸ You too should bear it patiently that such bitter tribulations have befallen you, tribulations which you are aware that you share with the saints. Even David suffered the bereavement of losing sons. He might have wished that at the time of their death they had been men like the

1 Phil. 1.21–23.

2 2 Sam. 15–23 (Vulg. 2 Kg. 15–23).

3 He had raped his sister Tamar.

4 2 Sam. 14.36 (Vulg. 2 Kg. 14.36).

5 He killed Ammon for the rape of Tamar, 2 Sam. 14.28–29 (Vulg. 2 Kg. 14.28–29).

6 2 Sam. 18.33 (Vulg. 2 Kg. 18.33).

7 Because of his bad conscience the powerful man is frightened by every rumour.

8 Job 15.20–21.

brother who was snatched away from you. He grieved over the crimes of his sons, not their deaths.

49. But granted that there must be lament: how long is the season of grief to be extended? Two entire months have passed during which you have embraced your brother's remains every day.¹ The only person in the Bible to demand a fixed length of time for her tears is the daughter of Jephthah. She did so after she had learnt that her father had vowed, as he was about to set out for battle, that if he returned victorious he would offer to the Lord the first thing that ran out to meet him. After the victory it was his daughter who ran out to meet her returning father, knowing his love,² not knowing the vow he had made. Her father saw her and groaned saying: *'Alas my daughter, you have trapped me, and have become a goad causing me great sorrow; for I have opened my mouth to the Lord concerning you, and I cannot avert the consequences'*. She answered him: *'Father, if you have opened your mouth about me, do to me as it came forth out of your mouth'*. And she spoke a second time: *'allow me two months, and I will go and weep for my virginity in the mountains, I and my companions of like age'*. And so after the passing of two months, she returned and complied with the obligation of the sacrifice, and by a decree of the people of Israel she was lamented for four days annually by the women of that people.³

50. So the daughter of Jephthah thought two months were sufficient to weep for the flower of her virginity, and the resurrection had not yet come. And she thought that in that space of time she had been adequately mourned by a few companions. As for you, all people have been weeping with you, all provinces have been groaning, and do you think even so that these acts of supplication still fall short? Even if you could buy back your brother with your own death, he would not want to be restored to life at the expense of your suffering, seeing that he believes that it is better for his life to continue in you, that he chose to die himself rather than to see wrong done to you, that he has been ready to sacrifice himself gladly on your behalf, and that on the very day of our sorrow⁴ he is reported to have made just this one utterance:

1 The sisters have presumably been with their brother's remains since his death on 15 May, 392 (*PLRE* 1.934–95, s.v. Valentinian 8). It would therefore seem that this speech was delivered in the second half of July, or early in August.

2 *Pietatem*.

3 Jg. 11.35.

4 That is, the day of Valentinian's death. Ambrose in this chapter suggests a motivation for Valentinian's death, which he strongly suggests was voluntary (cf. also c. 35). As in his

‘alas,¹ my unhappy sisters!’ So he grieved more for your bereavement than he did for his own death.

51. But I hear that you are grieving because he has not received the sacrament of baptism.² Tell me whether we have complete control over anything other than our motive,³ and our ability to ask?⁴ But he had already for a long time had that particular wish, namely that he should be initiated before he came to Italy.⁵ And more recently he let it be known that he wished to be baptised by me. And for this more than for any other reasons, he thought that I ought to be summoned. Is he not therefore in possession of the grace which he intended to receive, in possession of the grace that he demanded? And because he asked, he received.⁶ And that is why the text says: *No matter by what kind of death the just man is forestalled, his soul will find rest.*⁷

52. Grant therefore, O holy Father, to your servant the gift that Moses received because he saw in spirit, which David earned because he learnt from revelation. Grant, I say, to your servant Valentinian, the gift that he desired, the gift for which he asked, when he was healthy, strong and safe. If because of illness, he had postponed his request, he would surely have not

treatment of this theme elsewhere, Ambrose’s sentences are ambiguous and require interpretation. Ambrose seems to be saying that Valentinian feared that his sisters would suffer unless he put an end to his own life. This could perhaps mean that Valentinian feared assassination by Arbogast, and that after that coup, Arbogast was likely to kill his sisters also, because supporters of the Valentinian dynasty would rally around them. But if Valentinian died by his own hand, there would be no reason to avenge him, and Arbogast could afford to let the sisters live. That is why Valentinian chose to kill himself.

1 *Vae*: earlier emperor’s last words beginning *vae*: Seneca, *Apococynthosis* 4.3; Suetonius, *Vespasian* 23.4.

2 Ambrose places great stress on the likelihood of Valentinian’s salvation. Valentinian himself may well have been worried about this; and after his death, friends and relatives, and even Ambrose himself (cf. c. 52) will have been anxious, not only because Valentinian had not received baptism, but also because it was likely that he had committed suicide, and because of his *Homoian* past.

3 *Voluntas*, see glossary.

4 To intend to have something is under our control, actually to receive it is not. Therefore in the matter of baptism what counts is the sincere intention to receive it, not the fact of having received it. So Valentinian’s intention to receive baptism ought to count, as if he had actually received it.

5 I.e. to receive baptism.

6 Cf. Lk.11.9: ‘Ask and it will be given you’.

7 Wis. 4.7. Dudden 1935, 420, cites this passage as evidence that Ambrose believed in the validity of baptism of desire. He cites passages from Augustine, Tertullian and Cyprian supporting this doctrine, especially in the case of martyrs.

been totally beyond your mercy, as he would have been deprived by the speedy passing of time, not by his own decision. Grant therefore to your servant the gift of your grace, which he never rejected, he who shortly before the day of his death had refused to restore the privileges of the temples, though those making the demands were men whom he could respect. A crowd of pagans was standing by. The senate was pleading. He was not afraid to displease men, so that he might please You alone, in Christ.¹ How could this man, who had Your spirit, not receive Your grace?

53. But if it really is a cause for worry² that the mysteries³ have not been celebrated, it follows that not even martyrs receive crowns, if they are catechumens;⁴ for (on that assumption) they cannot be crowned unless they have been initiated. But if the martyrs have in fact been baptised in their own blood, then Valentinian's piety and intention have in effect baptised him too.

54. Do not O Lord, I beg You, separate him from his brother, do not allow the yoke linking the pious brothers to be broken.⁵ Gratian here, who is yours already, and has been cleared by your judgement,⁶ is still in jeopardy in case he is separated from his brother, in case he is not thought to deserve to be with him, through whom he deserved to be acquitted.⁷ What hands he now raises to you, O Father! What prayers he is now pouring out for his brother! With how tight an embrace he clings to him! How he will not allow him to be torn from his grasp!

1 On Valentinian's rejection of a senatorial petition to restore the altar of Victory shortly before his death see also *Ep. ex.* 10.5. He had previously rejected a petition around 389 (*Ep. ex.* 10.4), and in the famous episode of 384 (*Ep. ex.* 10.2–3; cc. 19–20 above and *Epp.* 72, 72a and 73).

2 'Cause of worry' translates *mouet*. Ambrose, curiously, is putting an argument to God such as a barrister might put to a judge.

3 Ambrose regularly uses 'mystery' and 'initiation', terms of the pagan mystery cults, to describe baptism and the ceremony of receiving baptism. See his treatise *De mysteriis*, ed. B. Botte, *Sources Chrétiennes* 25, 2nd edn, Paris 1980, 156–93; trans. B. Ramsey as *On the mysteries*, in Ramsey 1997, 146–60.

4 If Valentinian's intention is not to count in his favour because he has not been baptised, it would follow that catechumens, converts who have not yet been baptised, cannot become martyrs. But if the blood shed for the faith counts as a substitute for baptism, then Valentinian's intention to be baptised and his standing up to the pagan senators should count also.

5 Ambrose now makes Gratian intercede for his brother. He is evidently still uncertain whether Valentinian's 'baptism of desire' is valid. He obviously cannot be certain of divine judgement.

6 Gratian has been saved and is in heaven.

7 Does Ambrose mean that Gratian owed the fact of his own salvation to the prayers of intercession of his brother, because his imitation of Christ has given strength to his prayers of intercession?

55. Their father too is with them, who from love of the faith showed contempt for imperial service under Julian, and for the honour of the tribunate.¹ Give to the father his son, to the brother his brother. He has imitated both, the one in his faith, the other in the devotion and piety with which he denied the temples their privileges. What his father had omitted he completed, what his brother had decided he safeguarded. And I am now undertaking the role of intercessor on behalf of somebody whose divine recompense I already take for granted.

56. Offer with your hands the sacred mysteries!² With pious affection let us demand rest³ for him. Offer the heavenly sacraments! Let us escort the soul of our son⁴ with offerings. *Lift up with me your hands O people to the holy places*,⁵ so that through this offering⁶ at least we may reward him as he deserves! I am not going to strew his mound with flowers, but I will bathe his spirit in the *perfume of Christ*.⁷ Let others scatter lilies from full baskets. Christ is our lily. With Christ I will consecrate Valentinian's relics, through Christ I will commend him for his grace. I will never separate the names of the two pious brothers,⁸ never discriminate between their merits. I know that this shared commemoration will gain the favour of the Lord and that this union will please him.

57. Nor let anyone think that the merits of these two men have been diminished by their too early deaths. Enoch too was snatched away in case wickedness caused him to change his heart.⁹ In the eighteenth year of his

1 Socrates, *HE* 313; Sozomen, *HE* 6.6; see D. Woods, 'A note on the early career of Valentinian I', *Anc. Soc.* 26 (1995), 273–88.

2 This passage echoes lines of Virgil in praise of Marcellus, the prematurely deceased nephew of Augustus, especially the lines 'with full hands give lilies...' (*Aen.* 6.883–86). The use of Virgil's *date* which I have translated 'offer', the word order, and subsequently the use of *nepos* to describe Valentinian, the mention of an offering of lilies, and the words 'at least' show that Ambrose wanted the allusion, that is the parallel between Marcellus and Valentinian, to be recognised.

3 *Requiem*.

4 *Nepos*, 'our son' in the sense in which Paul addresses the Corinthians as 'my beloved sons' in 1 Cor. 4.14 (Vulg.).

5 Ps. 134.2 (Vulg. 133.2).

6 Virgil's 'offering' is 'in vain' (*inani munere*), not so, of course, that of the sisters of Valentinian.

7 2 Cor. 2.15

8 This reference to the *piorum fratrum ... nomina* is resuming the discussion of Gratian together with Valentinian at c. 54.

9 This is a combination of Gen. 5.21–24 and Wis. 4.11.

reign Josiah so celebrated the Pasch of the Lord that he surpassed all previous kings in devoutness, and he did not live much longer notwithstanding the merits of his faith. On the contrary, because heavy destruction was about to befall the Jewish people, the just king was removed before it happened.¹ I fear that you too were snatched away from us for some offence of ours, so that in the eighteenth year of your reign² you might escape the bitterness of some disaster about to happen, because you are just.

58. But now I must embrace the remains that are so dear to me, and lay them in a tomb worthy of them.³ First, however, let me scan each limb! O my Valentinian, you are *my youth radiant and ruddy*,⁴ bearing a likeness of Christ in himself. For with these words the Church in the Song of Songs honours Christ. And do not think that this address (of mine) is sacrilege.⁵ Slaves also are branded with the mark of their lord, and soldiers are marked with the name of the emperor. Moreover even the Lord himself said: *Don't touch my anointed ones*,⁶ and *You are the light of the world*;⁷ and Jacob said: *Judah, your brothers are to praise you*!⁸ He was speaking to his son, and he made a revelation about the Lord.⁹ And about Joseph he (Jacob) said: *My son Joseph has been magnified, my son has been magnified*!¹⁰ And he meant Christ.

59. It is therefore lawful for me to mark a servant with the sign of the Lord: *My youth radiant and ruddy, chosen from among ten thousand*.¹¹ My son was

1 2 Kg. 21–30 (Vulg. 4 Kg. 21–30).

2 Valentinian was proclaimed Augustus in 375, when he was four years old.

3 *Menander Rhetor* XVI (pp. 205–06) recommends that a monody should end with praise of the deceased's appearance. Ambrose follows this advice, praising first Valentinian's body then his soul: rather he interprets allegorically images describing the beautiful body of the bridegroom in the Song of Songs as figuring the virtues of the embodied Valentinian, and goes on to interpret images illustrating the beauty of the bride as figuring the disembodied soul of Valentinian on its way to heaven.

4 S. of S. 5.3. According to Faller (n. on c. 60.1) this and subsequent interpretations of the Song of Songs derive from Origen.

5 'Sacrilege' translates *iniuria*. Ambrose is about to cite as figuring Valentinian passages from the Song of Songs which Origen, and others since, had referred to Christ. Earlier too he has repeatedly stressed that Valentinian's conduct had been Christ-like. In this chapter he justifies what he is aware some people will find objectionable.

6 Ps. 105.15 (Vulg. 104.15).

7 Mt. 5.14.

8 Gen. 49.8.

9 Literally, 'He revealed the Lord'.

10 Gen. 49.22.

11 S. of S. 5.10.

chosen, when after the death of his father, still a little boy, he was given a share of the imperial power.¹ *His head is a rock of gold, his eyes are like doves, beside an abundance of water.*² For *there we sat and wept*,³ as they said who returned from there.⁴

60. *His belly was an ivory casket*⁵ to receive the oracles of the scriptures, so that he was able to say: *My bowels are in pain*,⁶ as the prophet has said; for the man who says these things is an imitator of Christ.⁷

61. *His cheeks are like vials of spice*⁸ into which the ointment of Christ was being poured.

62. *His lips are like dripping lilies, full of myrrh, his hands are rounded, golden, full of precious stones from Tharsus*,⁹ because from his words justice shone brightly, and in his deeds and works grace was reflected. And his address too was full of power and royal authority, nor were his constancy and his precious and faultless correction of men's deeds impaired by any fear of death. For every good workman is a hand of Christ.

63. *His conversation is delightful and he is altogether longed for*.¹⁰ For with what delight all his judgements are still cited in everyone's conversation!¹¹ With what pleasure is every one of his talks recalled! O my son, how much the people miss you. Me you have certainly moved deeply with that last message of yours demanding that I should stand surety for you.¹² You left behind¹³ a personal testimonial of the very high estimation in which you

1 Valentinian was born in 371, proclaimed Augustus in November 375.

2 S. of S. 5.11–12.

3 Ps. 137.1 (Vulg. 136.1).

4 That is, the Israelites returning to Canaan from exile, where they had wept by the waters of Babylon.

5 S. of S. 5.14.

6 Jer. 4.19.

7 The sufferings of the prophet Jeremiah foreshadowed those of Jesus, but they are here cited to represent the hardships of Valentinian, who imitated Christ.

8 S. of S. 5.13.

9 S. of S. 5.13.

10 S. of S. 5.16.

11 *Fauces*, literally throat, as in the first sentence, but here it must mean something like 'speech' or 'conversation'.

12 *Vadem tuum fieri postulabas*: although very similar words are used here and in c. 25 to describe the 'surety' that Valentinian hopes from Ambrose, the two passages do not refer to the same thing. Here Ambrose is to stand surety before God, there before the count Arbogast.

13 *Reliquisti* according to Faller's *CSEL* text; older editions (e.g. *PL* 16.1377c) read *requisisti* ('You sought from me...')

held me. I was not able to give you the assurance,¹ which I was preparing to give, but I pronounced it away from you, and Christ heard me pronouncing my assurance on your behalf. My pledge has been accepted in heaven, if not on earth. I have been made answerable to God, even though I was unable to make myself answerable to men.

64. I have spoken about your body; I will now speak about your soul, which is worthy of the prophet's praise.² I will therefore use the same *exordia*.³ *Who is she who looks forward like the dawn, fair as the moon, excellent as the sun.*⁴ It seem to me that I see your light shining, that I hear you speaking: 'That, father is my dawn! *The earthly night is far gone, the heavenly day has come near.*'⁵ You are therefore looking down on us, holy soul, from a higher region, as it were looking back at things below. You have left the shadows of this world of ours, and you shine like the moon, you gleam like the sun. And *like the moon* is well said. Because even though previously you were shining in the shadow of that body of yours, and illuminating the darkness of the earth, now you have borrowed light from *the sun of justice*,⁶ and are leading in the bright day. And so it seems to me that I can see you as you depart from your body, and driving away the shadows of the night, rise like the sun at dawn, and as you draw near to God, with rapid flight like an eagle,⁷ you leave behind all earthly things.

1 *Fidem*, which I have translated in the sense of an assurance or guarantee that Valentinian was fit for baptism and hence salvation. He could not give it to Valentinian face to face but he gave it to God and thus put himself answerable to God for the worthiness of Valentinian.

2 Ambrose's praise of Valentinian's soul consists of a vision of his soul ascending to heaven in the form of an allegorical interpretation of the bridegroom's address to the bride in the Song of Songs. The interpretation of the bride as an allegory of the Christian soul's love for Christ and/or her ascent to heaven goes back to Origen. But Ambrose had already employed it extensively in his *Isaac or the Soul* (translated in *Fathers of the Church* 65, 10–65) and in *On the Mysteries* (translated in Ramsey 1997, 145–60).

3 The exordium of the bridegroom's address to the bride in S. of S. 6.9ff.

4 S. of S. 6.10.

5 Rom. 13.12. Ambrose puts these words of St Paul into the mouth of the Shu'llamite (i.e. the soul of Valentinian) as it pauses, and turns around, on its way to heaven.

6 Mal. 4.2.

7 An allusion to Is. 40.31, but it also recalls the eagle released during the cremation of a Roman emperor to signal his consecration, cf. S. G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1981, 99–100, 104; see also the fourth-century ivory of the apotheosis of an emperor, E. Kitzinger, *Early Medieval Art*, 3rd edn, London 1988, fig. 5.

65. *Turn around, O Shu'lammitte,¹ turn, turn, and we will look upon you!*² turn to us, peace-loving soul,³ so as to show your glory to your sisters, and so that they begin to find consolation in the certainty that you are at rest and in a state of grace. Turn around to us just once, so that we see you, and then turn away once more, and hasten with all speed to that great Jerusalem, the city of the saints. Or rather as Christ is saying this to a pious soul,⁴ He is ordering her⁵ to turn around for a little while, so that her glory and her future rest with the saints may be revealed to us; and He then instructs her to hasten to that heavenly assembly of the saints.

66. *What will you see, he says, in the Shu'lammitte, who is coming on like a regiment of the camp?*⁶ that is to say, in one who while in the body has fought often and against many enemies. For she⁷ has fought against external enemies, she has fought against the deceitful vicissitudes of this world, she has fought against the weaknesses of the body, against the various passions. She has heard the Lord say: *Turn O Shu'lammitte*. She turned once, for the sake of peace in the world. On the command being repeated, she turned to the grace of Christ; and so while her turning in the world was a beautiful sight, more beautiful still is her stately progress and flight towards heaven.

67. Therefore she has earned the right to hear the words: *Your movements in your shoes have become beautiful, daughter of Aminadab*, that is daughter of an emperor.⁸ For you have made beautiful progress in the body, using it as

1 Solamitis in Latin, Shu'lammitte in RSV. In *Isaac* 7 (57) Ambrose interprets the order given to the Shu'lammitte (meaning the Christian soul) to turn away (S. of S. 6.13; Vulg. 6.12) as signifying God's need to attend to the salvation of less perfect souls. Here in c. 65 he interprets it as an order to the soul of Valentinian to pause on its way to heaven in order to show other souls how they can get there. But in 66 the verse is applied to Valentinian's striving for peace on earth. Perhaps there is a suggestion that he died to avoid civil war?

2 S. of S. 6.13 (Vulg. 6.12). Except for the threefold (instead of fourfold) repetition of the imperative the quotation translates the Sept.

3 *Pacifica*, peace-loving, is an etymology of Solamitis, also in *Isaac* 8.66.

4 Ambrose assumes that the scriptural words have been inspired by Christ. The 'pious soul' in this case is that of Valentinian.

5 In this and subsequent sentences, Ambrose uses feminine pronouns (*illa* and *ea*) to refer to the 'pious soul', for which the Latin (*anima pia*) is feminine.

6 *Sicut chori castrorum*.

7 She, that is, the soul of Valentinian, *anima* in Latin, which is feminine.

8 *Principis*: interpretation of Aminadab as 'prince/emperor' is also assumed in *Isaac* 8.65. As in c. 68 the prince/emperor Aminadab figures God, the father of Valentinian's soul, as of all souls, and not Valentinian I.

a shoe and not as a cloak,¹ to appear taller and more conspicuous, and to turn your steps wherever you wished without stumbling; and, not least to be able to discard it like a shoe, as Moses did, who was ordered: *put off your shoes from your feet*.²

68. Therefore your father Aminadab, that emperor of the people,³ now says to you: *Hear, O daughter, and see that the king has desired your beauty*.⁴ *Your movements in your shoes have become beautiful, O daughter of Aminadab, the roundness of your thighs resembles that of crowns*,⁵ meaning that the grace and self-control which the soul of Valentinian had consistently displayed in all his actions were equivalent to the insignia of great triumphs. For it was because of your self-control and peace-loving serenity that Gaul did not experience an invading enemy, and that Italy repelled an enemy who was threatening her borders. And there can be no doubt that crowns are the insignia of victory, since they who have fought bravely in battle are honoured with crowns.

69. *Your navel is a rounded bowl, that never lacks blended wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. Your neck is like a tower of ivory. Your eyes are like the pools in Hesbon*.⁶ The good navel of the soul is able to contain all the virtues, like a bowl turned by the Author of our faith Himself. For *wisdom has blended her wine*⁷ in a bowl, saying: *Come eat my loaves, and drink the wine that I have blended for you*.⁸ So this navel, turned (as it is) with all the beauty of virtues, is not lacking in blended wine. His⁹

1 According to Ambrose, Valentinian's soul used the body like footwear, as a means of locomotion and not as a covering.

2 Ex. 3.5; cf. Origen *In Gen. hom.* 8.7 (p. 82.1–5 Baehrens).

3 S. of S. 7.1. The translation of Aminadabas as 'prince' or 'emperor' (*princeps populi*) is also assumed in *Isaac* 8.65, and derives ultimately (via Origen) from an uncertainty about the meaning of the Hebrew.

4 Ps. 45.11–12 (Vulg. 44.11–12).

5 S of S. 7.1.

6 S of S. 7.2, 4. The interpretation goes back to Origen, *Excerpta Procopiana* ch. 7, PG 13.212 B.

7 Pr. 9.1–2.

8 Pr. 9.5.

9 *Eius*, which can mean either 'her' or 'his'. As 'her' it refers to the beloved of Song of Songs, whom Ambrose is interpreting as an allegory of the soul (*anima*) of Valentinian, which is also feminine. Translated as 'his' it refers to Valentinian himself. The Latin can be either masculine or feminine, but in English a choice has to be made. I have used 'his' throughout, as have Kelly and Deferrari in their translations. To assign feminine gender to the soul of a man would seem rather odd in English. But the paradox is in Ambrose's text, and is clearly deliberate.

belly too was not only filled with the food of justice as if with wheaten food, but also with the sweetness of grace, and it flowered delightfully like a lily. His neck also was white and pure, willingly subject to the yoke of Christ. Reasonable thoughts, the fragrance of faith, the mark of circumcision, were the glorious adornments of his head, which was to be crowned not by royal diadems but by the insignia of the blood of the Lord.

70. Deservedly he¹ ascends like a king,² victor over sin, wreathed with a heavenly crown, and God the Word says to his soul: *How beautiful and pleasant you are become, O loved one, in your delights.*³ Beautiful through the adornment of virtue, pleasant through grace, *tall like a palm*,⁴ which is the prize of the victor.⁵

71. Gratian, his brother, runs to meet this ascending soul,⁶ and embracing her⁷ he says: *I have come for my brother and his turning has been for me*,⁸ either because he wishes his brother to cling to himself or because he intends to stand beside his brother with brotherly love as an advocate, saying that his brother's turning⁹ to him must matter more than his own state of grace.

72. *Come*, he says, *my brother, let us go out into the field, let us take rest in villages, at dawn let us go up into the vineyards!*¹⁰ This means, you have come here where the rewards for the various virtues are assigned according to the deserts of each individual, where there is an abundance of prizes for merit. Let us therefore go out into the field, where work is not unrequited, but where there is a rich harvest of grace. Harvest here what you have sown on earth, gather here what you have scattered there! Or at least come into

Ambrose has enhanced the effect of paradox by describing Valentinian's soul in terms of imagery which is highly physical (belly, food, neck), and therefore evocative of his physical – and masculine – body.

1 This is masculine.

2 The simile relates the ascent to heaven of a Christian ruler, victor over sin and wearing a crown more than hinting at the crown of martyrdom to the traditional apotheosis of an emperor. cf. above note 000. The passage is interpreted in S. MacCormack 1981, 148–49.

3 S. of S. 7.6; cf. Origen, *Excerpta Procopiana* c. 7, PG 13.213 A.

4 Cf. S. of S. 7.7.

5 Cf. 1 Cor. 9.25.

6 Cf. Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 25.

7 Again Ambrose uses the feminine pronoun (*ea*) to refer to the soul (*anima*). See n. 000 above on c. 65.

8 S. of S. 7.10.

9 'Turning' is surely here used in the same sense as in c. 65.

10 S. of S. 7.11–12.

that field which is as the odour of Jacob,¹ that is, come into the lap of Jacob, so that as the poor man Lazarus found rest in Abraham's bosom,² so you may find rest in the peace of Jacob the patriarch, for the lap of the patriarchs is a retreat as it were of eternal peace. Rightly therefore Jacob is a fertile field, as is testified by the patriarch Isaac who said; '*behold the odour of my son is like the odour of a plentiful field, which the Lord has blessed.*'

73. '*Let us rest*', he says, '*in the villages*',³ pointing out that rest is safer where, being fortified and walled in by the refuge of heaven, it is not harassed by assaults of the wild animals of this world.

74. *Over our doors*, he says, *are all the fruits of the trees.*⁴ *New and old, my brother, I have kept for you. Who will give you to me, my brother, as a brother sucking at my mother's breast? If I meet you outside I will kiss you, I will take you, and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I will give you to drink wine of costly spices, the juice of my pomegranates. His left hand will be under my head, and his right hand will embrace me.*⁵ Gratian assures his brother of august memory that the fruits of the different virtues are at his own disposal. For he too was faithful in the Lord, pious and mild and pure of heart. He was also chaste in body, for he knew no intercourse other than with his wife.

75. He therefore has fruits ready at the gates of his residence, (which are) not far to seek. To his brother he offers the fruits he has kept for him, both old and new, the sacraments of both the Old Testament and of the Gospel, and he says:⁶ *Who will give you to me, my brother, a brother sucking at my mother's breast?*⁷ that is to say: 'it was not just anybody but Christ who enlightened you with spiritual grace'. He baptised you, because human ministry was not available to you.⁸ You gained a greater thing while you thought that you had lost a smaller. What are the breasts of the Church other than the sacrament of baptism?⁹ And rightly he describes as *sucking* one who having

1 Gen. 27.27.

2 Lk. 16.12.

3 S. of S. 7.11.

4 S of S. 7.13.

5 S of S. 8.1–3.

6 Gratian asks the question because he knows that his brother had not been baptised at the time of his death.

7 S. of S. 8.1.

8 Because Ambrose, by whom Valentinian wished to be baptised, had not come (cf cc. 23–27).

9 Cf. Origen, *In Exod. hom.* 2.3 (p.158.6–10 Baehrens).

been baptised, seeks, so to say, juice of snowy milk. *If I meet you outside*, he says, *I will kiss you*, that is to say, 'finding you outside your body, I will embrace you with the kiss of mystic peace'. Nobody is to despise you, nobody is to exclude you, I will introduce you to in to the sanctuary and hidden places of mother Church, and into all the secrets of the mystery, that you may drink the cup of spiritual grace.

76. And so having embraced his brother he began to lead him to his own dwelling, and because in doing his duty to his brother he had advanced to the lower regions, he began to ascend in the company of his brother, praying for himself and his brother that in that place their love might grow to be greater, because envy and pride had faded away, the human vices which in most people tend to nullify the obligations of fraternal love.

77. On catching sight of them both angels and other souls question those who were escorting the brothers, in the role, as it were, of dutiful companions, saying: *Who is that bright soul who is ascending, leaning on her brother?*¹ We for our part had no doubt at all as to the merits of Valentinian, but let us now at least believe the testimony of angels that Valentinian, who has been cleansed by his faith, and sanctified by his prayer, has ascended, washed clean, with the stain of sin wiped out. Let us also believe, as others have it,² that *he has ascended from the desert*,³ that is to say from this arid and untilled place to that region of flowering delights, where united with his brother he enjoys the pleasure of eternal life.

78. Both are blessed, if my prayers have any power. No day will pass you over in silence. No speech of mine will leave you unhonoured. No night will pass without your receiving some share in my prayers.⁴ I will remember you in all my offerings.⁵ Who will forbid me to name the innocent? Who will prohibit that I embrace you with expressions of esteem?⁶ *If I forget thee Jerusalem*, that is to say, holy soul, pious and peace-loving brotherhood, *let*

1 S. of S. 8.5.

2 I.e. in another biblical text. Ambrose indicates that he is citing from two different versions of Song of Songs.

3 This phrase is not in Sept. from which Ambrose seems to have regularly drawn his citation of Song of Songs for this speech, but it is in the *Itala*, and the Vulgate.

4 The passage is clearly intended to echo Virg. *Aen.* 9.446–47.

5 In every Mass.

6 This is a hint that some people will criticise Ambrose if he continues to offer prayers on behalf of the deceased emperors, as possibly showing insufficient loyalty to the living and reigning one.

*my right hand forget me, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not remember Jerusalem in the beginning of my joy.*¹ I will forget myself more quickly than I will forget you. Even if my speech is sometime silent my love will speak, although my voice will fail, my good will² which is rooted in my heart, will not fail.

79. *How are the mighty fallen!*³ How are they both fallen by those⁴ *rivers of Babylon!*⁵ How much more rapid has the course of life of each of the two men been than is the flow of the Rhone itself! O, Gratian and Valentinian *lovely and beloved* to me,⁶ within what narrow borders you have confined your life! How near to the edge of death you have lived! How close to your tombs! Gratian, I say, and Valentinian, it is agreeable to linger over your names, and it is pleasant to find peace by recalling you. O Gratian and Valentinian *lovely and beloved* by all! *Inseparable in life, even in death you are not divided.*⁷ The burial mound has not separated, whom love did not separate. The condition of death has not divided whom a shared piety bound together. There was no diversity of virtue to drive you apart. You were simpler than doves,⁸ *swifter than eagles*, milder than lambs, more innocent than calves.⁹ The arrow of Gratian *did not turn back*,¹⁰ and the justice of Valentinian was not in vain, nor his authority empty.¹¹ *How are the mighty fallen*, yet not in battle!¹²

79b. *I grieve for you*, Gratian, my son, *very sweet you have been to me.*¹³ You have given numerous proofs of your piety. In the midst of your dangers you kept asking for me, in your desperate situation you kept calling on me,

1 Ps. 137.5–6 (Vulg. 136.5–6).

2 *Gratia*, see glossary.

3 2 Sam. 1.19.

4 That is the Rhone: Gratian died at Lyons, Valentinian at Vienne, both on the Rhone; Lyons lies at its junction with the Saône.

5 Ps. 137.1 (Vulg. 136.1).

6 2 Sam. 1.23.

7 2 Sam. 1.23.

8 Mt. 10.16.

9 The sentence is a Christian variation of 2 Sam.1.23. So ‘simpler than doves’ replaces ‘stronger than lions’.

10 Based on 2 Sam.1.22, replacing the scriptural ‘bow’ by ‘arrow’, perhaps in allusion to Gratian’s skill as a hunter (Amm. Marc. 31.10.19).

11 Again developed from 2 Sam.1.22 with ‘justice’ significantly replacing the scriptural ‘sword’.

12 Unlike Saul and Jonathan, Gratian and Valentinian did not die in battle.

13 2 Sam. 1. 26.

APPENDIX II

399

you grieved all the more because of my grief for you. *I did indeed grieve for you, Valentinian my son, most lovely to me. Your love had fallen on me as the love of a dear child.*¹ You thought that you were being rescued from danger by me. You not only used to love me as though I were a parent, but you placed your hope in me as your redeemer and liberator. You used to say: 'Do you think that I will see my father?'² Your desire for me was *lovely*, but your anticipation was futile. Woe is me, for that vain hope placed in a man!³ But in the person of his bishop you were asking for the Lord. Woe is me, that I did not know your desire sooner! Woe is me, that you did not send for me secretly before! Woe is me, what dear ones have I lost! *How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons perished*,⁴ that are so profoundly missed.

80. O Lord since no one is able to give to others more than he wishes for himself, do not separate me in death from those whom in this life I felt to be most dear. Lord, I pray *that where I will be they may be also with me*,⁵ that there I might enjoy perpetual union with them, because here I was unable to possess their companionship longer. I ask you, supreme God, that with a timely resurrection you may raise and resuscitate these most dear young men, that you balance the untimely conclusion of this life of theirs with a timely resurrection.

1 2 Sam. 1.26 has 'than love of a women'. Ambrose has replaced *mulierum* by *pignoris*

2 I.e. Ambrose, his spiritual father. Ambrose is alluding to the letter Valentinian had sent him just before his death, cf. c. 25.

3 Cf. Sir. 34.1.

4 2 Sam. 1.27.

5 Cf. Jn 17.24.

GLOSSARY

Acclamations: the formalised and rhythmical shouting with which groups (for instance the people assembled in a theatre, bishops assembled in a council, or the senate) expressed their approval or disapproval. Acclamation might be said to have taken the place of voting in the Late Empire

Adventus: the ceremonial entry of the emperor into a city.

Agentes in rebus: a corps whose function it was to supervise the public post. Its members were used by the emperor on confidential missions and to gather information.

Annona: 1. The wheat raised in Africa and transported to Rome for the free distribution of bread to the inhabitants of the city. 2. The wages in kind of soldiers and civilians in the imperial service.

Arca frumentarii: a treasury at Rome which received the profits from the sale of state corn that had not been needed for the free distribution of bread.

Arca Vinaria: the treasury responsible for the supply of wine and meat to Rome. It paid for all public works except the aqueducts.

Basilica: originally a royal assembly hall, in secular contexts a colonnade, in Christian Latin it came to mean a church building.

Chamberlain: (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*), the head of the imperial household and the head of its staff of *cubicularii*. All these men were eunuchs and ex-slaves, and because of their closeness to the emperor the *praepositus* and his subordinates were often extremely influential.

Clarissimus: a title given to members of the senates of Rome and Constantinople, and to men who held, or had held, high positions in the imperial service, giving them the rank of senators without membership of the senate.

Cognitores: a kind of jury, five chosen by each party to judge or arbitrate the dispute between Ambrose and Auxentius in the presence of the imperial consistory.

Consistory: The emperor's advisory council, composed of the praetorian prefect, the leading counts and other high officials.

Consularis: The title of a provincial governor of senatorial rank.

Councillors/decurions or curiales: Hereditary members of a city council or *curia*. They were responsible for the administration of their city, performing liturgies, i.e. paying for some services out of their own pockets. They also collected the imperial tax. The duty was unpopular and the government issued numerous laws to prevent them from escaping into other careers such as the army or the Church.

Count (comes): a rank of distinction conferred by the emperor, which was also held *ex officio* by the heads of certain central departments, e.g. the count of the private estates (*res privata*) and the count of the sacred largesses.

Count of the East/comes Orientis: the title of the governor of the Oriental diocese.

Count of the private estates: the high official in charge of the private property of the emperor, including estates confiscated by him.

Count of the sacred largesses: the chief financial officer of the empire, whose department received taxes in money (as opposed to taxes in kind) and who was responsible for the issue of gold and silver coins.

Cursus publicus: the imperial transport service maintained at the expense of the cities, and intended for use by the imperial administration, though permission to use it might be given to others, for instance bishops travelling to a Council.

Decani: minor palace officials.

Defensor: a civic official appointed originally to look after the interests of those too weak to do this for themselves. In time he became the principal civic magistrate.

Diocese: its original secular meaning is one of a dozen or so groupings of provinces into which the Empire was divided, all except Orient being governed by a vicar.

Dux: commander of troops stationed along a section of frontier.

Edict: written order issued by the emperor, or one of his officials, to the people, or a particular grouping of them, as, for instance, the inhabitants of a province or a city.

Fiscus: the central imperial treasury, not designating any particular department of it.

Gentiles: 1. Foreigners. 2. Barbarian mercenaries (federates). 3. Pagans.

Grace: *gratia*, the grace of God, the divine gift which enables men to think or do what they would be unable to think or do of their own accord.

Hannibal: Carthaginian general who between 218 and 202 BC came close to defeating the Romans in Italy.

Haruspex: an expert in the interpretation of the entrails of sacrificial animals, a traditional roman priesthood.

Homoios (like): the Council of Ariminum defined the Son as being 'like' the Father.

Homoousios (of the same essence): the Council of Nicaea defined the Son as being of the same 'essence' as the Father.

Honorati: individuals who by virtue of present or past imperial office, whether actually held or awarded honorifically, have the rank of senators and immunity from the duties of decurions.

Indiction: the tax demand that went out on 1 September each year.

Illustrious: *illustris*, the title given to the highest ranking officials in the imperial service, the praetorian and urban prefects, the leading Counts, and the head of the central secretarial departments, the *magister officiorum*.

Labarum: the imperial standard carrying the monogram of Christ, instituted by Constantine.

Memoriales: members of the senior bureaux (*scrinium*) of palace secretaries.

Magister equitum: the general commanding the cavalry of a field army.

Magister militum: general commanding the infantry of a mobile field army. After the death of Theodosius I, Stilicho, the *magister peditum praesentalis*, the commander of the field army stationed in Italy, was the most powerful man in the West.

Nicaea, council of: the first ecumenical council in AD 325, where the Nicene creed was formulated.

Notaries: originally the secretaries of the imperial consistory; members of this department acquired great influence and were used by the emperor for confidential missions. In Ambrose's time they had senatorial rank.

Patriarch: title of the bishops of Alexandria and Constantinople.

Piety: *pietas*, which has the sense of doing one's duty to god(s) and/or to one's family.

Praepositus sacri cubiculi: the chief of the sacred bedchamber, the head of the private household of the emperor. Although a eunuch and ex-slave his proximity to the emperor gave him great influence.

Praetorian prefect: the Western Empire was divided into two very large administrative districts: Italy, Africa and Illyricum, and Gaul, which included Spain and Britain. The region of Illyricum was split between the Eastern and Western empires, and eastern Illyricum was a separate prefecture. The Eastern Empire comprised two prefectures: Illyricum and Oriens (the East). Each prefecture was governed by a praetorian prefect. The praetorian prefects were the most powerful civil officials after the emperor(s)

Prince: translates *princeps*, the description of his position originally chosen by Augustus to define his status as that of first citizen rather than king. The title remained in common use in the fourth century.

Rescript: emperors used to write their reply to questions or petitions addressed to them by officials or private individuals on the letter bearing the request. The reply was known as a rescript, and had the force of law.

Rest: *requies*, especially the rest of death, and the 'peace of God that passes all understanding'.

Rimini (Ariminum), council of: council of western bishops in 359 which agreed to the *Homoian* creed, which was accepted by the opponents whom Ambrose calls Arians..

Sacerdos: literally 'priest', but in Ambrose almost always 'bishop'.

Senones: a Gallic tribe settled in the north of Italy, who were thought to have been prominent in the Gallic band that captured Rome in 390 BC.

Septuagint: the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was adopted by the Church. It got its name from the legend that it was made by 70 learned Jews, on the order of Ptolemy II of Egypt. It is said that they worked independently, but produced identical versions.

Silentarii: ushers at meetings of the consistory, sometimes used for confidential missions.

Superindictio: a tax demand additional to that regularly issued on 1 September.

Tribune: a military officer.

Tribune and notary: a high-ranking notary with rank of *clarissimus*.

'Unbelievers': *perfidi* in secular Latin are persons who break their promises, are treacherous and dishonest. In Christian Latin it has this meaning too, but it often was used of those who do not have 'the faith', i.e. are not Christians, but pagans or Jews or heretics.

Urban prefect (*praefectus urbi*): this official was appointed by the emperor, usually from the highest senatorial nobility, to govern Rome and Italy for one hundred miles around the city, with the rank of *illustris*. He was ex-officio chairman of the senate.

Theodosian Code: a collection of imperial laws compiled in 438, and probably the most important source for the history of the Empire and especially its administration in the fourth century.

Vicar: deputy praetorian prefect, in charge of a group of provinces (a diocese) to exercise appellate jurisdiction and supervise the provincial governors. The Vicar of Rome had authority in central and southern Italy (*Italia Suburbicaria*), and the Vicar of Italy in northern Italy (*Italia Annonaria*).

Vestal Virgins: the priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of the public hearth, who were obliged to remain virgins during their thirty years of service. They shared a mansion close to the temple, and were until 382 maintained from the revenue of certain estates.

Victory: the deified abstraction of military victory, which had a statue and altar in the meeting place of the Roman senate. In pagan days senators swore official oaths over this altar.

Voluntas: the human will and source of moral action. In Ambrose's view it is the only thing fully under man's control, and it is man's duty to control it so that it operates in accordance with the commands of God.

Vulgate: Jerome's revision of the Latin Bible. The Gospels were completed by AD 384. He then (AD 384–90) translated the Psalms and some books of the Old Testament from the Septuagint. During the following fifteen years he produced a new translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EDITIONS OF WORKS TRANSLATED IN THIS VOLUME

- Ambrose, *Letters*, Book Ten, ed. M. Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.3.
Ambrose, *Oration on the Death of Theodosius*, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, 369–401.
Ambrose, *Oration on the Death of Valentinian*, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, 327–67.
Ambrose, *Letter* 30, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 82.1. 207–15.
Letter of the Emperor Gratian to Ambrose, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 79, 3–4.
Letter of Pope Siricius, ed. M. Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.3, 296–301.

PRIMARY SOURCES

This bibliography lists only the main sources cited. For further details of classical sources, see S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn, Oxford 1996. For early Christian sources, see J. Quasten et al., *Patrology*, 4 vols, Utrecht/Antwerp and Westminster, MD, 1950–86.

(i) Works of Ambrose

- De excessu fratris*, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, 207–325.
De fide, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 78.
De obitu Theodosii, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, 369–401; trans. R. J. Deferrari in *Fathers of the Church* 22, Washington, DC, 1953, 307–32.
De obitu Valentiniani, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, 327–67; see also *Sancti Ambrosii Liber de Consolatione Valentiniani, a text with a Translation and Commentary*, by T. A. Kelly, Washington, DC, 1940; trans. R. J. Deferrari in *Fathers of the Church* 22, Washington, DC, 1953, 265–99.
De mysteriis, ed. B. Botte, *Sources Chrétiennes* 25, 2nd edn, Paris 1980, 156–93; trans. Ramsey 1997, 46–60.
De institutione virginis, in *PL* 16, 319–48.

- De Ioseph*, ed. C. Schenkel, *CSEL* 32.1, 73–122; trans. M. P. McHugh in *Fathers of the Church* 65, 189–237.
De Isaac et anima, ed. C. Schenkel, *CSEL* 32.1, 641–700; trans. M. P. McHugh in *Fathers of the Church* 65, 9–65.
De officiis, ed. and trans. in *Davidson* 2002.
De paenitentia, ed. O. Faller, *CSEL* 73, 117–206.
De virginibus, in *PL* 16, 197–244; trans. Ramsey 1997, 73–91.
De virginitate, in *PL* 16, 279–316.
Enarrationes in XII psalmos Davidicos, ed. M. Petschenig, *CSEL* 64.
Epistulae, ed. O. Faller and M. Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.1–3.
Epistulae extra collectionem, ed. M. Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.3.
Exhortatio virginitatis, in *PL* 16, 335–64.
Explanatio psalmorum, ed. M. Petschenig, *CSEL* 62.

(iii) Selected editions of works by other authors cited in the notes

- Acts of the Council of Aquileia*, ed. M. Zelzer, *CSEL* 82.3, 313–68.
 Claudian, *De sexto consulatu Honorii*, ed. M. Dewar, Oxford 1996.
 Gregory of Nyssa, J. A. Stein, *Encomium of Saint Gregory of Nyssa on his Brother Saint Basil*, Revised Text, Commentary and Translation, Washington, DC, 1928; *Life of Macrina*, trans. W. K. Lowther Clarke, Early Church Classics, London 1916.
 Hilary of Poitiers, *Contra Auxentium*, in *PL* 627–724.
 Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius*, ed. A. L. Feder, *CSEL* 65, 39–193; trans. in Wickham 1997.
 Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, ed. R. W. Burgess, Oxford 1993.
 Libanius: see Bradbury 2004.
 Menander Rhetor, edited with translation and commentary by D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, Oxford 1981.
 Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson, London 1957.
 Pacatus, *Panegyric*, in Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 448–516.
 Palladius, *Apology*, in Gryson 1980, 264–325.
Panegyrici Latini, in Nixon and Rodgers 1994.
 Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, ed. with trans. and commentary by M. Kaniecka, Washington, DC, 1928.
 Ruricius of Limoges: see Mathisen 2000.
 Symmachus: see Seeck 1883.

MODERN WORKS

- Auerbach, E. (1965), *Literary Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. R. Mannheim, London.
- Barnes, M. R., and Williams, D. H. (eds) (1993), *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, Edinburgh.
- Barnes, T. D. (1992), 'Augustine, Symmachus and Ambrose', in *Augustine: from Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. J. McWilliams, 7–13.
- (1993), *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, Cambridge, MA.
- (1999), 'Ambrose and Gratian', *Antiquité Tardive* 7, 165–74.
- (2000), 'Ambrose and the basilicas of Milan in 385 and 386', *ZAC* 4, 282–99.
- (2002), 'Valentinian, Auxentius and Ambrose', *Historia* 51, 227–37.
- Bayenka, Sister M. (trans.) (1954), *Saint Ambrose: Letters*, Fathers of the Church 26, Washington, DC.
- Baynes, N. H. (1936), review of McGeachy 1929, *JRS* 36, 173–77 (repr. in Baynes *Byzantine Studies and other Essays*, London 1955, 361–66).
- (1955), 'Alexandria and Constantinople', in Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and other Essays*, London, 97–115.
- Bickermann, E. (1937), *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, Berlin.
- Biermann, M. (1955), *Die Leichenrede des Ambrosius von Mailand: Rhetorik, Predigt, Politik*, Hermes Einzelschrift 70, Stuttgart.
- Birley, A. R. (1982–83), 'Magnus Maximus and the persecution of heresy', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 66, 13–43.
- Bradbury, S. (2004), *Selected Letters of Libanius* (Translated Texts for Historians 41), Liverpool.
- Brooks, E. W. (1902–04), *The Sixth Book of the Letters of Severus of Antioch*, 4 vols, London, repr. Farnborough 1969.
- Brown, P. (1961), 'The Christianisation of the Roman aristocracy', *JRS* 51, 1–11, reprinted in Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine*, London 1972, 162–82.
- (1967), *Augustine of Hippo*, London.
- (1988), *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York.
- (1992), *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: towards a Christian Empire*, Madison, WI.
- Burn, A. E. (1926), *The Hymn 'Te deum' and its Author*, Cambridge.
- Burnaby, J. (1947), *Amor Dei*, London.

- Cabouret, B. (2000), *Libanios, lettres aux homes de son temps*, Paris.
- Cameron, Alan (1968), 'Gratian's repudiation of the pontifical robe', *JRS* 58, 96–102.
- Cameron, Averil and Hall, Stuart G. (1999), *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*, Oxford.
- Cavallera, F. (1905), *Le schisme d'Antioche (IVe–Ve siècle)*, Paris.
- Cecconi, G. A. (2002), *Commento storico al Libro II dell'epistolario di Q. Aurelio Simmaco*, Pisa.
- Chadwick, H. (1976), *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church*, Oxford.
- Clark, E. A. (1984), *The Life of Melania the Younger*, Lewiston, NY.
- (1986), *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith*, Lewiston, NY.
- Clark, G. (1993), *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles*, Oxford.
- Collinson, P. (1979), "'If Constantine, then also Theodosius': St Ambrose and the integrity of the Elizabethan *Ecclesia Anglicana*", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 30, 205–29.
- Conybeare, C. (2000), *Paulinus Noster, Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, Oxford.
- Courcelle, P. (1968), *Recherches sur les "Confessions" de Saint Augustin*, 2nd edn Paris.
- Cracco-Ruggini, L. (1999), 'Prêtre et fonctionnaire, le modèle ambrosien', *Antiquité Tardive* 7, 175–86.
- Croke, B. (1976), 'Arbogast and the death of Valentinian II', *Historia* 25, 235–44.
- and Harries, J. (1982), *Religious Conflict in Fourth Century Rome, a Documentary Study*, Sydney.
- Cumont, F. (1923), *After Life in Roman Paganism*, London.
- Dassmann, E. (1965), *Die Frömmigkeit des Kirchenvaters Ambrosius von Mailand*, Münster.
- Davidson, I. J. (2002), *Ambrose: De Officiis*, Oxford.
- Declercq, G. (2000), *Anno Domini*, Turnhout.
- Dodds, E. R. (1972), *The Ancient Idea of Progress and other Essays in Greek Literature and Belief*, Oxford.
- Dörner, M. (2001), 'Ambrosius in Trier', *Historia* 50, 217–44.
- Drijvers, J. W. (1992), *Helena Augusta*, Leiden.
- Dudden, F. H. (1935), *The Life and Times of St Ambrose*, Oxford.
- Duval, Y.-M. (1968), 'Formes profanes et formes bibliques dans les oraisons funèbres de saint Ambroise', in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de*

- l'antiquité tardive en occident*, ed. M. Fuhrmann, Geneva, 235–92.
- (1969), 'Sur l'Arianisme des Ariens d'Occident', *Mélanges de science religieuse* 26, 145–53.
- (1974), 'L'originalité du "de virginibus" dans le mouvement ascétique occidentale', in Duval (ed.), *Ambroise de Milan XVI Centenaire*, Paris, 9–66.
- Evapoel, W. (1990), 'Prudence et la conversion des aristocrates romains', *Augustinianum* 30, 31–43.
- Fontaine, J. (1976), 'Prose et poésie dans la création littéraire d'Ambroise', in Lazzati, 1976, vol. 1, 124–70.
- (1981), *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien*, Paris.
- (1992), *Ambroise de Milan: hymnes*, Paris.
- Frede, H. J. (1976), 'Probleme des ambrosianischen Bibeltextes', in Lazzati 1976, Milan, vol. 1, 365–92.
- Frend, W. H. C. (1952), *The Donatist Church*, Oxford.
- Gaudemet, J. (1958), *L'Église dans l'empire romain*, Paris.
- Gibbon, E. (1896–1900), *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, 7 vols, London.
- Girardet, K. M. (1974), 'Trier, der Prozess gegen die Priskillianer', *Chiron* 4, 577–608.
- (1994), 'Gericht über den Bischof von Rom', *Historische Zeitschrift* 259, 1–38.
- Gottlieb, G. (1985), 'Der Mailänder Kirchenstreit', *Mus. Helv.* 42, 37–55.
- Gryson, R. (1968), *Le prêtre selon saint Ambroise*, Louvain.
- (1980), *Scolies ariennes sur le Concile d'Aquilée*, Sources Chrétiennes 267, Paris.
- Hägg, T., and Rousseau, P. (eds) (2000), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, CA.
- Hanson, R. P. C. (1988), *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: the Arian Controversy 318–81*, Edinburgh.
- Harries, J. (1994), *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome*, Oxford.
- Heather, P. (1991), *Goths and Romans 332–489*, Oxford.
- and Matthews, J. (1991), *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, Liverpool.
- Hefele, K. J. and Leclercq, H. (1907–52), *Histoire des Conciles*, 11 vols, Paris.
- Humphries, M. (1999), *Communities of the Blessed. Social environment and religious change in northern Italy AD 200–400*, Oxford.
- Hunt, E. D. (1982), *Holy and Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford.

- Hunter, D. G. (1987), 'Resistance to the virginal ideal in late fourth century Rome', *Theological Studies* 48, 45–64.
- Jones, A. H. M. (1964), *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A social, economic, and administrative survey*, Oxford.
- Kahler, E. (1958), *Studien zum 'Te deum'*, Göttingen.
- Kelly, J. N. D. (1972), *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edn, London.
- (1975), *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies*, London.
- (1995), *Golden Mouth, the story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop*, London.
- Kelly, T. A. (1940), *Sancti Ambrosii Liber de Consolatione Valentiniani. A Text with a Translation and Commentary*, Washington, DC.
- Kitzinger, E. (1988), *Early Medieval Art*, 3rd edn, London.
- Krusch, B. (1880), *Der 84jährige Ostercyclus und seine Quellen. Studien zur christlich mittelalterlichen Chronologie*, Leipzig.
- Latte, K. (1960), *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, Munich.
- Lazzati, G. (ed.) (1976), *Ambrosius Episcopus*, Milan.
- Lenox-Conyngham, A. (1982), 'The topography of the basilica conflict of AD 385/6 at Milan', *Historia* 31, 353–63.
- Leppin, H. (1996), *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II, das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret*, Göttingen.
- (2003), *Theodosius der Grosse*, Darmstadt.
- Liebeschuetz, J. H. W. G. (1972), *Antioch*, Oxford.
- (1995), *From Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, Aldershot.
- Lieu, S. N. C. and Montserrat, D. (eds) (1998), *Constantine, History, Hagiography and Legend*, London and New York.
- Lipsius–Bonnet (ed.) (1891), *Actus Petri cum Simone (vel Actus Vercellenses)*, in *Acta Apostolorum apocrypha*, ed. R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, Leipzig, vol. 1: 45–103.
- Lizzi, R. (1989), *Vescovi e strutture ecclesiastiche nella città tardoantica (l'Italia Annonaria nel IV–V secolo d.C.)*, Como.
- (1990), 'Ambrose's contemporaries and the Christianization of Northern Italy', *JRS* 80, 156–73.
- Lucchesi, E. (1977), *L'usage de Philon dans l'oeuvre de saint Ambroise, 'Quellenforschung' relative aux commentaires d'Ambroise sur la Genèse*, Leiden.
- Lyman, R. (1993), 'A topography of heresy: mapping the rhetorical creation of Arianism', in Barnes and Williams 1993, 45–62.
- MacCormack, S. G. (1981), *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley,

BIBLIOGRAPHY

411

- Los Angeles, London.
- McCormick, M. (1986), *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge.
- McGeachy, J. A. (1929), *Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West*, dissertation of the University of Chicago.
- McLynn, N.B. (1991), 'The Apology of Palladius: nature and purpose', *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 42 (1991), 52–76.
- (1994), *Ambrose of Milan, Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
- (2004), 'The Transformation of Imperial Churchgoing in the Fourth Century', in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds), *Approaching Late Antiquity. The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, Oxford, 235–70.
- Madec, G. (1974), *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie*, Paris.
- Maier, J.-L. (1973), *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine*, Rome.
- Mansi, J. D. (1901–02), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 35 vols, Paris; repr. Graz 1960–1.
- Mannix, Sister M. M. (ed.) (1925), *Sancti Ambrosii oratio de obitu Theodosii*, Washington, DC.
- Markus, R. (2001), 'Evolving disciplinary context for the study of Augustine, 1950–2000', *Augustinian Studies* 32.2, 189–200.
- Mason, A. J. (1904), 'The first Christian Latin poet', *Journal of Theological Studies* 5, 413–32.
- Mathisen, R. W. (2000), *Ruricius of Limoges and Friends: a Collection of Letters from Visigothic Gaul*, Translated Texts for Historians 30, Liverpool.
- Matthews, J. F. (1974), 'The Letters of Symmachus', in J. W. Binns (ed.), *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, London, 58–99.
- (1975), *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court, AD 364–425*, Oxford.
- (1989), *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, London.
- Mazzarino, S. (1989), *Storia sociale del vescovo Ambrogio*, Rome.
- Meslin, M. (1967), *Les Ariens d'Occident 335–430*, Paris.
- Mohrmann, C. (1961), *Études sur le Latin des chrétiens*, vol. 1, Rome.
- (1965), *Études sur le Latin des chrétiens*, vols 2–3, Rome.
- (1977), *Études sur le Latin des chrétiens*, vol. 4, Rome.
- Mratschek, S. H. (2001), 'Multis enim notissima est sanctitas loci, Paulinus and the gradual rise of Nola as a center of Christian hospitality', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, 511–53.

- (2002), *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola, Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen Christlichen Intellektuellen*, Hypomnemata 134, Göttingen.
- Nixon, C. E. V., and Rodgers, B. S. (1994), *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford.
- Norman, A. F. (1992), *Libanius Autobiography and Select Letters*, Vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, and London.
- O'Meara, J. J. (1958), 'Augustine and Neo-Platonism', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1, 91–111.
- Opitz, H. G. (ed.) (1934), *Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites in Athanasius Werke* III, I: 1–75.
- Palanque, J.-R. (1933), *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain*, Paris.
- Paschoud, F. (1965), 'Réflexions sur l'idéal religieux de Symmaque', *Historia* 14, 215–35.
- (1986), *Zosime, histoire nouvelle*, vol. 4, Paris.
- Picard, J.-C. (1988), *Le souvenir des évêques*, Rome.
- Pietri, Ch. (1976), *Roma christiana. Recherches sur l'église de Rome (311–440)*, 2 vols, Paris.
- Ramsey, B. (1997), *Ambrose*, London and New York.
- Rauschen, G. (1897), *Jahrbücher der christlichen Kirche unter Theodosius dem Grossen*, Freiburg.
- Rebenich, S. (1985), 'Gratian, a son of Theodosius, and the birth of Galla Placidia', *Historia* 34, 372–85.
- Ruggini, L. (1961), *Economia e società nell'Italia Annonaria. Rapporti fra agricoltura e commercio dal IV al VI secolo d. C.*, Milan.
- Salzman, M. R. (1990), *On Roman Time*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford.
- (2002), *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, Cambridge, MA.
- Saunders, J. L. (1966), *Greek Philosophers after Aristotle*, London and New York.
- Savon, H. (1977) *Saint Ambroise devant l'exégèse de Philon le Juif*, Paris.
- (1995), 'Saint Ambroise a-t-il imité le recueil des letters de Pline le Jeune?', *REA* 41, 3–17.
- Schwartz, E. (1905), *Christliche und jüdische Ostertafeln*, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. Kl., N.F. VIII. 6, Berlin.
- Scourfield, J. H. D. (1993), *Consoling Heliodorus*, Oxford.
- Seeck, O. (ed.) (1883), *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, VI. 1), Berlin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

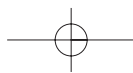
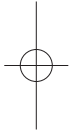
413

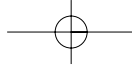
- (1906), *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet*, Leipzig, repr. Hildesheim 1967.
- (1910–20), *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*, 6 vols, Berlin.
- Sherwin-White, A. N. (1966), *The Letters of Pliny. Historical and Social Commentary*, Oxford.
- Sivan, H. (1993), *Ausonius of Bordeaux*, London.
- Soffel, J. (1974), *Die Regeln Menanders für die Leichenrede*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 51, Meissenheim am Glan.
- Sparks, H. F. D. (1970), 'Jerome as a biblical scholar', in P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, Cambridge, 510–41.
- Sykutris, J. (1931), 'Epistolographie', *RE Suppl.* 5, 185–220.
- Talbert, R. J. A. (1984), *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, Princeton, NJ.
- Thraede, K. (1970), *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik*, Zetemata 48, Munich.
- Trisoglio, F. (1972), 'Sant Ambrogio connobe Plinio il giovane?', *Rivista di Studi Classici* 20, 363–410.
- Trout, D. E. (1999), *Paulinus of Nola*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
- Urbainczyk, T. (2000), *Theodoret of Cyrrhus, the Bishop and the Holy Man*, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Von Campenhausen, H. (1929), *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker*, Berlin.
- Wallis, R. T. (1972), *Neoplatonism*, London.
- Walpole, A. S. (1922), *Early Latin Hymns*, Cambridge, repr. Hildesheim 1966.
- Walsh, P. G. (1967), *Letters of S. Paulinus of Nola*, 2 vols, *Ancient Christian Writers* 35–36, London.
- (2001), *Augustine, De bono coniugali, and De sancta virginitate*, Latin text, English translation, introduction and notes, Oxford.
- Waltzing, J. P. (1895), *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains*, 4 vols, Brussels, repr. Hildesheim 1970.
- Wickham, L. R. (1997), *Hilary of Poitiers: Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth Century Church*, *Translated Texts for Historians* 25, Liverpool.
- Williams, D. H. (1992), 'The anti-Arian campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the *Liber contra Auxentium*', *Church History* 61, 7–22.
- (1993), 'Ambrose, emperors and *homoians* in Milan: the first conflict over a basilica', in Barnes and Williams 1993, 127–46.

- — (1995), *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene–Arian Conflicts*, Oxford.
- Wood, S. F., and Walford, B. H. (trans.) (1881), *The Letters of Ambrose*, Library of the Fathers of the Catholic Church 45, Oxford.
- Woods, D. (1995), ‘A note on the early career of Valentinian I’, *Anc. Soc.* 26, 273–88.
- Zelzer, K. (1977), ‘Zur Beurteilung der Cicero-Imitatio bei Ambrosius *de officiis*’, *Wiener Studien* 90, 168–91
- — and Zelzer, M. (2002), ‘Retractationes zu Brief und Briefgenos bei Plinius, Ambrosius und Sidonius Apollinaris’, in *Alvarium, Festschrift für Christian Gnülka*, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Suppl. 33, 393–405.
- Zelzer, M. (1977), ‘Zu Aufbau und Absicht des zehnten Briefbuches des Ambrosius’, in *Latinität und Alte Kirche: Festschrift R. Hanslik*, Wiener Studien Beiheft 8, Vienna, 351–362.
- — (1989), ‘Plinius Christianus; Ambrosius als Epistolograph’, *Studia Patristica* 23, 187–208.
- — (2001), ‘Das ambrosianische Corpus *De virginitate* und seine Rezeption im Mittelalter’, *Studia Patristica* 38, 510–23.



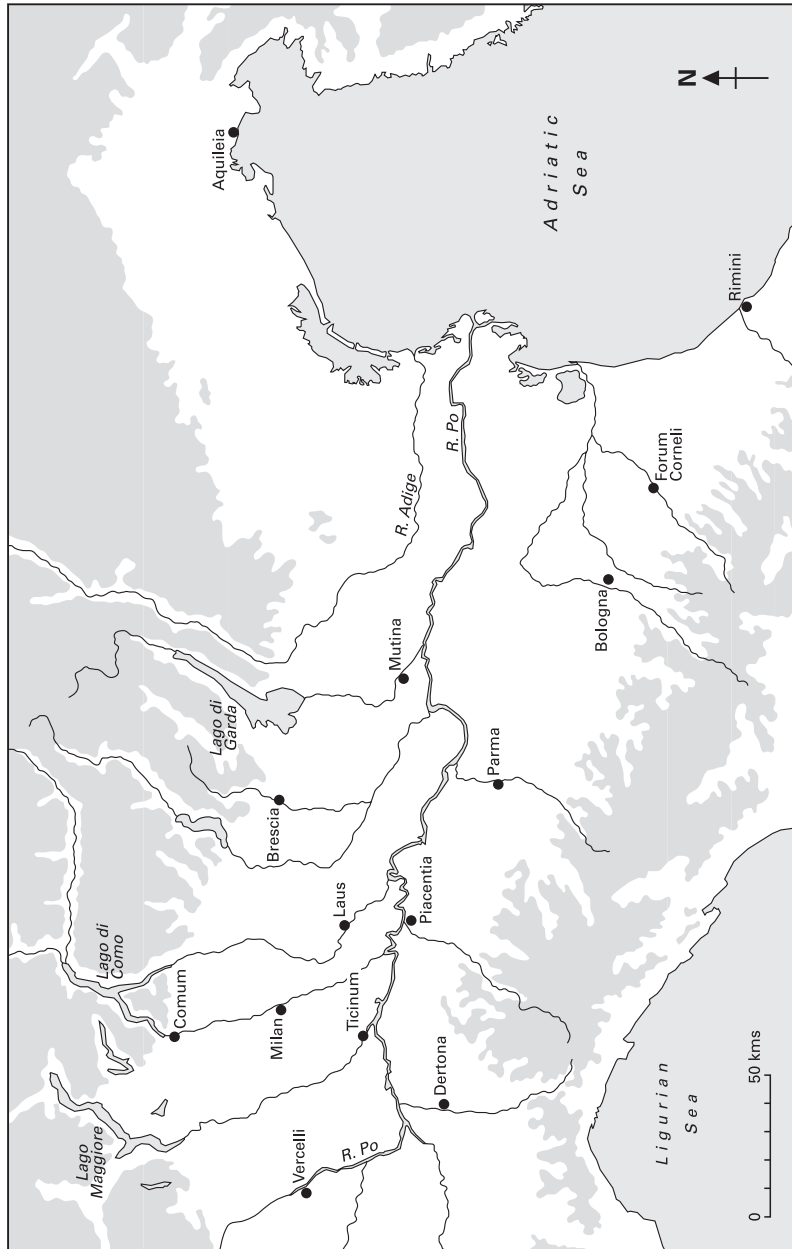
MAPS



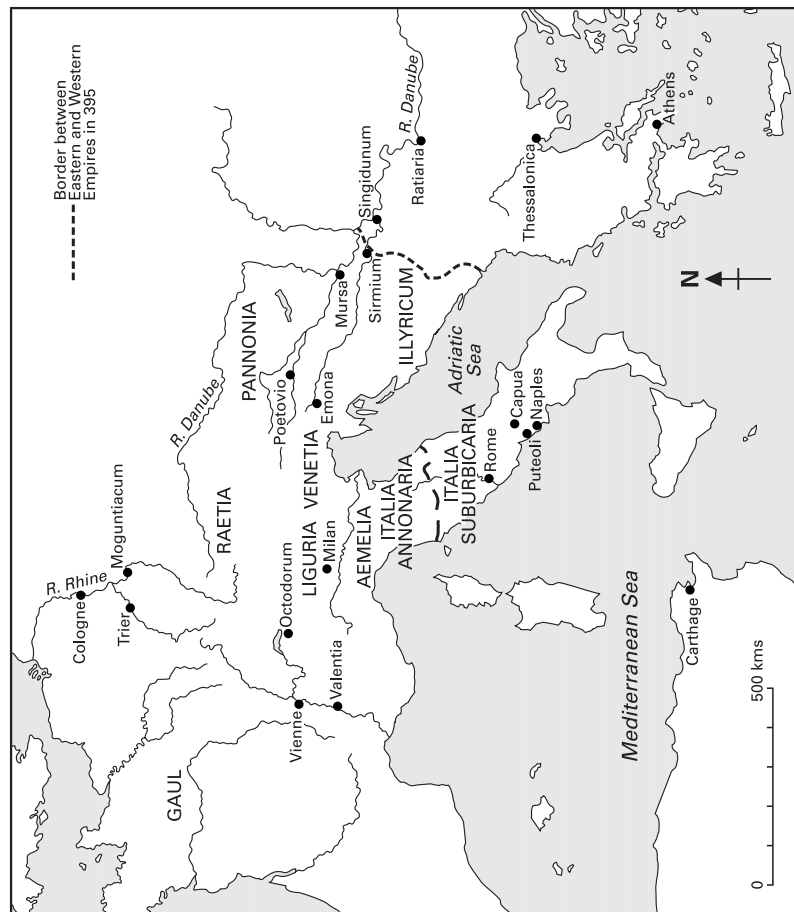


416

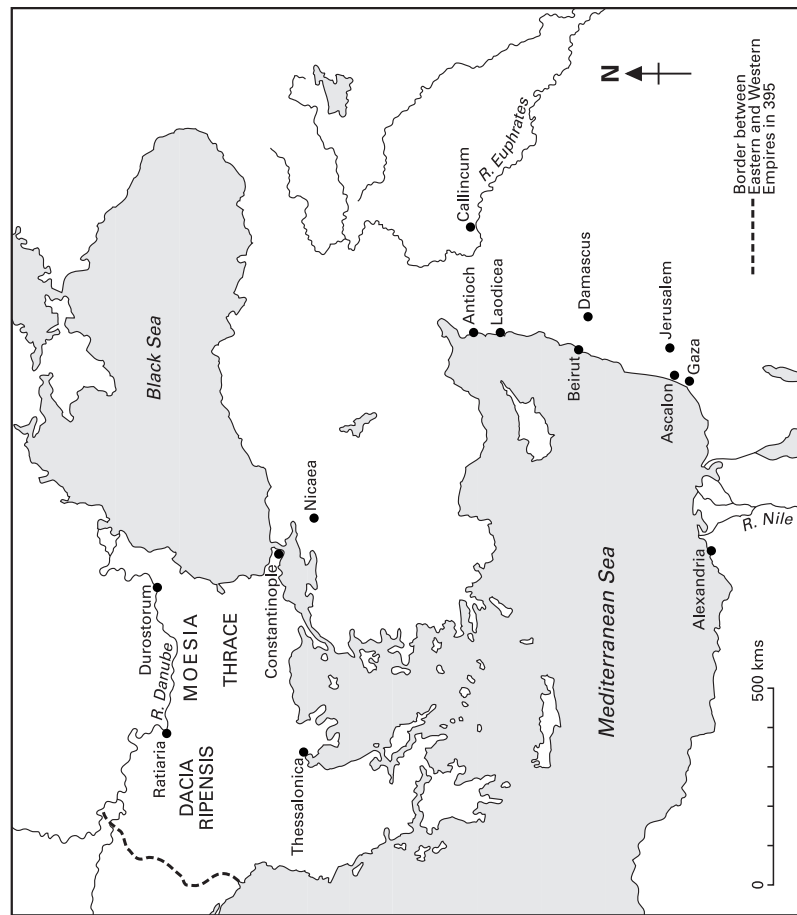
AMBROSE OF MILAN



Map 1: Northern Italy in the time of Ambrose



Map 2: The Western Roman Empire, showing places mentioned in the text



Map 3: The Eastern Roman Empire, showing places mentioned in the text

INDEX

- Aaron 112, 113, 121, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316
 Abel 187
 Abijah 185
 Abiram 313
 Abner 267
 Abraham 181, 182, 202, 333
 Absalom 385
 Achaia 243
 Acholius 240
 Actium 61
 Adam 167, 168, 300–1, 343
 Adrianople 11, 244
 Aemelia 6, 278–91
 Africa 242, 245, 251
 Africanus 82
 Ahab 322
 Alamanni 355
 Alamannia 355
 Alexander 7, 339, 345
 Alexandria 52, 103, 236, 237, 239, 279, 280, 284
 Alps 365, 376
 Altar of Victory 61–94
 Ambrose (father) 5
 Aminadab 394
 Ammon 385
 Amon 185
 Amorites 105
 Anabaptists 251
 Ananias 319
 Anemius 11, 246
 Anna 306, 343
 Antioch 22, 36, 49, 52, 110, 231, 232, 235, 238, 241, 259
 Apollinaris 232, 233, 242
 Aquileia 4, 12, 13, 38, 49, 52, 112, 221–43, 227, 228, 231, 233, 234, 237, 239, 241
 Aquilinus 244, 247, 248
 Arbogast 19, 179, 217, 258, 358, 359, 376, 377
 Arcadius 71, 102, 174, 180, 184, 193
 Arians 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 124, 128, 129, 131, 140, 152, 157, 163, 165, 176, 210, 211, 224, 228, 229, 234, 235, 238, 239, 242, 270, 273, 369
 Arius 7, 224, 225
 Asa 184
 Ascalon 103
 Asher 119
 Athanasius 7, 239, 243
 Atilius 82
 Attalus 226
 Augustine 24, 26, 30, 34, 42, 124, 126, 294
 Augustus 166, 374
 Auxentius 9, 10, 15, 127, 129, 131, 132, 136, 138, 139, 140, 150, 153, 155, 156, 160, 321, 339, 345
 Azarias 319
 Balak 121
 Balkans 235, 243, 359

- Barbatianus 298
 Barnes, Timothy 246
 Basil 30
 Basilica Ambrosiana 134, 204, 205
 Basilica of Fausta 205
 Basilica Nova 133, 161, 162, 163,
 164, 165, 168, 169, 170, 171,
 172
 Basilica Portiana 125, 127, 129, 160,
 161, 162, 163
 Basilica Vetus 161, 165, 171, 172
 Bassianus 339, 340, 345
 Bassus 60
 Bauto 257, 353, 354, 355
 Beersheba 323
 Beirut 103
 Belial 150
 Benevolius 128
 Bibles 363
 Bonosus 22, 36, 50, 56, 58–60, 336
 Botrys 121
 Britain 245
 Butheric 262
- Caelestis 91
 Caesar 157, 159
 Caesaria 53
 Cain 116, 187
 Calligonus 173
 Callinicum 17, 36, 38, 39, 44,
 95–111, 215, 263
 Camillus 82
 Canaanites 105
 Capitolinus 104
 Capua 22, 49, 49–60, 54, 56, 336–7
 Carthage 91, 93
 Castulus 162
 Catholics 165, 234, 235, 236, 237,
 238, 252, 338
 Cherith 322, 323
- Christians 6, 109, 111, 166, 169, 176,
 200, 338, 359, 373
 Chrysostom, John 30, 131, 181
 Cicero 360
 Claudianus 251
 Constantine 5, 14, 175, 197, 246,
 254, 321
 Constantinople 12, 17, 19, 37, 102,
 131, 132, 174, 203, 221, 231–43,
 232, 233, 237, 239, 240, 242, 243,
 351, 358
 Constantius 7–8, 61, 72, 73, 92, 140,
 251, 339, 345
 Crescens 339, 345
 Crispus 176
 Cybele 91
 Cyrus 93
- Dacia Ripensis 235
 Dalmatius 136
 Damali 304
 Damascus 9, 11, 50, 61, 66, 103, 227,
 233, 244, 246, 248, 252, 253
 Daniel 301, 305, 319, 372, 373
 Dathan 313
 David 106, 118, 121, 169, 190, 262,
 265–8, 284, 316, 333, 363, 371,
 385, 387
 Demofilus 234
 Dimarchus 303
 Dionysius 9, 151, 304, 320–1
 Dodona 76
 Domitian 31
 Donatists 275
 Dudden, F. Homes 3–4, 5
 Durostorum 15, 129
- Easter 278–91
 Egypt 55
 Eleazar 316

INDEX

421

- Elijah 168, 295, 305, 319, 322, 323
 Elisha 147, 182, 208, 295, 306, 319
 Enoch 389
 Epicurus 300, 302
 Esau 331–2, 333
 Esther 306
 Eugenius 38, 174, 179, 182, 193,
 196, 216–20, 217, 218, 219,
 255–61, 256, 259, 260, 261, 358
 Eusebius 52, 176, 294, 296, 319
 Eustasius 339, 345
 Eustorgius 151
 Euthymus 125, 129
 Evagrius 49, 52, 53, 54, 55–6
 Eve 167, 168, 300
 Eventius 339, 345
 Ezra 306
- Fausta 176
 Felix 218, 219, 339, 345
 Filastrius 9
 Flacilla 197
 Flavianus 49, 54, 55–6, 231, 232,
 233, 237
 Flavius Eusignius 162
 Florentius 251
 Franks 107
- Galla Placidia 193
 Gallicanus 352
 Gaul 242, 245, 258, 355, 358, 359,
 378, 394
 Gaza 103
 Gehazi 182, 208
 Geminianus 339, 345
 Genialis 339, 345
 Gerasenes 152
 Germinator 339, 345
 Germinius 11, 246
 Gervasius 16, 37, 134, 204–13
- Gideon 108
 Gnaeus Pompeius 93
 Goliath 198
 Goths 164, 165, 167, 181, 235
 Gottlieb, 127–8
 Gratian 11–14, 16, 35, 38, 61, 62, 64,
 70, 129, 196, 197, 201, 221–30,
 222, 223, 227, 228, 230, 232, 233,
 234, 239, 244–54, 245, 247, 248,
 268, 269, 270–7, 271, 274, 360,
 361, 363, 367, 388, 395, 396, 398
 Gregory of Nazianzus 175, 239, 360
 Gregory of Nyssa 360
 Gregory VII 45
- Hamilcar 93
 Hannibal 74, 81
 Helena 175, 176, 177, 197–200
 Helvidius 56, 293
 Hercules 259
 Herod 148
 Hilary of Poitiers 9
 Hildebrand 45
 Holofernes 305
Homoians 7–11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 37,
 124, 129, 131, 132, 133, 140, 222,
 228, 235, 273, 274, 275, 369
 Honoratianus 34
 Honoratus 295
 Honorius 174, 178, 180, 181, 184,
 193, 202, 360
 Huns 355
 Hydatius 349
- Illyricum 11, 12, 13, 56, 243, 245,
 272, 273
 Ingeniosus 339, 345
 Innocent I 248
 Irenaeus 34
 Isaac 182, 198, 252

- Isaiah 119
 Italia Suburbicaria 50

 Jacob 178, 179, 182, 202, 331–2,
 333, 390, 396
 Januarius 339, 345
 Jason 259
 Jephthah 386
 Jeremiah 102, 361, 370
 Jerome 52, 292, 293
 Jerusalem 361, 366
 Jews 104, 105, 108, 116, 117, 118,
 119, 120, 151, 157, 160, 168, 199,
 200, 209, 210, 211, 259, 287, 290
 Jezebel 168, 322, 324
 Joab 267
 Job 145, 166, 167, 206, 267, 385
 John 68, 120, 149, 160, 299, 306,
 322, 334
 Jonah 172
 Jonathan 267, 363
 Joseph 178, 179, 203
 Josephus 33
 Josiah 108, 184, 390
 Jovian 61
 Jovinianus 39, 50, 57, 292–345, 293,
 336, 339, 345
 Judas 118, 330
 Judith 305
 Julian 61, 93, 101, 103, 104, 105, 374
 Julius Valens 222, 226
 Justina 11, 12, 14–17, 44, 124–36,
 125, 129, 134, 165, 273, 349, 379

 Korah 313, 314
 Krusch, B. 280

 Lazarus 202, 396
 Leo I 248
 Leopardus 339, 340

 Libanius 29, 30, 42, 351
 Liberius 6, 10
 Licinus 7
 Liguria 6
 Limenius 292
 Lot 333
 Lucius 234
 Luke 303

 Macedonia 22, 51, 56
 McLynn, N. 4–5, 34, 36, 126–7, 130,
 131, 156, 163, 172, 204, 246, 262,
 263, 270, 271, 280, 281, 360
 Macrobius 34
 Magnus Maximus 14, 16, 17, 41, 49,
 63, 95, 106–7, 110, 129, 134, 171,
 179, 196, 237, 238, 239, 257, 339,
 345, 349–57, 383
 Manicheans 294
 Manichees 344
 Marcellina 5, 6, 10, 57, 111–23, 112,
 126, 161–73, 204, 215
 Marcianus 339, 345
 Marcus 226
 Maria 314
 Mary 293, 307, 334, 335, 342, 382
 Mattathias 111
 Melchizedek 311, 312
 Meletius 231, 235, 238
 Menander 360
 Mercurinus 153
 Mesopotamia 216
 Milan 12, 15, 37, 129, 134, 273, 274,
 276, 281, 337, 350, 358
 Miriam 121, 315
 Mirocletis 151
 Misael 319
 Mithras 91
 Moesia 235
 Moguntiacum 354

INDEX

423

- Moses 119, 121, 168, 178, 187, 269,
284–5, 301, 307, 309, 313, 314,
315, 333, 387, 394
- Naboth 150
- Naissus 50, 56
- Nathan 106, 121, 266
- Nebuchadnezzar 105
- Nectarius 232, 233, 237, 238, 239,
240, 242
- Nicaea 7, 56, 140, 223, 278, 281, 318
- Nicenes 7–11, 10, 12, 13, 26, 52, 128,
129, 132, 134, 140, 231, 232, 233,
246, 247, 271, 349
- Nineveh 172, 344
- Origen 4, 34, 187, 362, 363
- Palanque, J.-R. 3, 5
- Palladius 13, 222, 224, 225, 227, 228,
235
- Pannonia 19
- Paschasius 230
- Paul 28, 155, 171, 188, 206, 254,
269, 298, 302, 304, 305, 306, 307,
308, 309, 317, 318, 322, 324, 330,
343–4
- Paulinus 24, 26, 29, 30, 38, 39, 44,
52, 125, 126, 231, 235, 238, 242,
256, 262, 351
- Peter *see* Simon Peter
- Peter of Holy Memory 238, 239
- Petronius Probus 6–7
- Philo the Jew 4, 34
- Philominus 300
- Photinians 227
- Pliny 31–2, 42
- Plotinus 339, 345
- Poetovio 107, 226, 227
- Pontius Pilate 199
- Praetextatus 34, 62
- Priscillian 349
- Prosper 349
- Protasius 16, 37, 134, 204–13
- Prudentius 43, 69
- Pulcheria 197
- Puteoli 251
- Raab 333
- Rebecca 332
- Restitutus 251
- Rhaetias 355
- Rimini 8, 131, 133, 140, 154, 251
- Roman Council 244, 244–54
- Rome 5, 13, 15, 74, 81, 82, 90, 107,
279, 284, 372, 373, 374
- Rufinus 44, 124, 128, 136, 180, 225,
262
- Rumoridus 257
- Ruricius of Limoges 30
- Sabinus 27, 339, 340, 345
- Samaria 148
- Samson 33
- Samuel 121
- San Lorenzo 161
- San Tecla 133, 161
- San Vittore al Corpo 161
- Sant'Ambrogio 16
- Sara 181, 333
- Sardica 50, 56
- Sarmatio 298
- Satyros 5, 6, 10, 57, 361
- Saul 267, 363
- Schwartz, E. 280
- Scythia 153
- Secundianus 13, 222, 223, 224, 227,
228, 235
- Seneca 360
- Senecio 60

- Senones 74, 81
 Serena 193
 Severus 210
 Sicily 107
 Silvester 254
 Simon Peter 107, 113, 116, 117, 148,
 149, 186, 187, 301, 379
 Sion 368
 Siricius 22, 39, 50–1, 53, 248, 279,
 280, 336, 337, 339, 340
 Sirmium 11, 12, 129, 227, 246, 273
 Siscia 107
 Socrates 44
 Sodom 333
 Solomon 183, 371
 Song of Songs 361–2, 363
 Soteris 6, 57
 Sozomen 44, 128
 Spain 245
 Sta Maria Maggiore 161
 Stephen 297
 Stilicho 174, 179, 193, 360
 Syagrius 32–3
 Symmachus 15, 29, 30, 36, 40, 43,
 61, 62, 69–70, 71–8, 79, 80, 89,
 256, 257
 Tarpeian rock 82
 Thecla 307
 Theodore 44, 241, 262
 Theodosius I 11, 12, 13, 17–26, 36,
 37, 38, 39, 40, 44, 49, 52, 53, 67,
 70, 71, 79, 95–111, 109, 110, 111,
 129, 130, 132, 174–203, 215,
 216–20, 218, 219, 221–30, 222,
 227, 228, 231, 232, 233, 234, 237,
 241, 257, 258, 262, 263, 265, 273,
 280, 351, 356, 358, 359, 360, 361
 Theodulus 339, 345
 Theophilus 36, 51, 52–6, 279, 280,
 281
 Thessalonica 17, 18, 38, 39, 44, 58,
 262–9, 265
 Timasius 122
 Timotheus 235
 Trajan 31
 Trier 5, 12, 16, 41, 134, 272, 276,
 350, 352
 Uriah 262
 Ursinus 227, 228, 230, 249, 250, 252
 Valens 11, 229, 244
 Valentinian I 9, 10, 61, 138, 244
 Valentinian II 12, 12–14, 14–17, 19,
 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 62–78, 63, 69,
 71, 79, 80–94, 125, 129, 134,
 136–42, 138, 143–60, 171,
 221–30, 222, 227, 228, 233, 234,
 244–54, 248, 257, 258, 273, 350,
 351, 352, 355, 358–99
 Valentinian III 248
 Valerian 221
 Vallio 356
 Venus 91
 Vercelli 57, 292, 294, 295, 296, 319
 Vestal Virgins 68, 73, 76, 79, 81, 84
 Victor 354
 Vienne 79, 375
 Vigilius 33
 Virgil 34, 361
 Von Campenhausen, H. 3, 5
 Williams, D.H. 5, 270
 Zelzer, Michaela 31, 34, 37, 126,
 176, 280
 Zosimus 70